Obsidian • Die Hard Trilogy
Flying Corps • Star General

22 GAME REVIEWS

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ACTUAL SCREEN IMAGE

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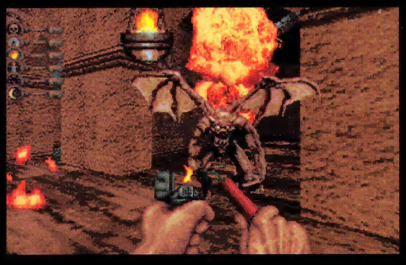
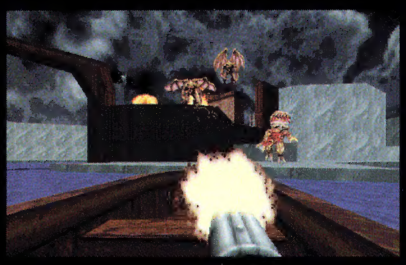
It's in your veins. It's on your hands. And you're screaming for it.

It's a tidal wave of first-person shooter carnage...



Who to Kill: zombies, cultists, gargoyles, hellhounds, mimes, bats, rats and more



Where to Kill: graveyards, crematoriums, mausoleums, slaughter houses and more

How to Kill: voodoo dolls, flamethrowers, pitchforks, dual tommyguns, TNT and more

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march 1997

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MATURE M AGES 17+ ESRB

DOS/PC CD-ROM

GT Interactive Software

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you're
soaking
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"The Course Designer is a landmark!"
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GOLFWEEK

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PC Games

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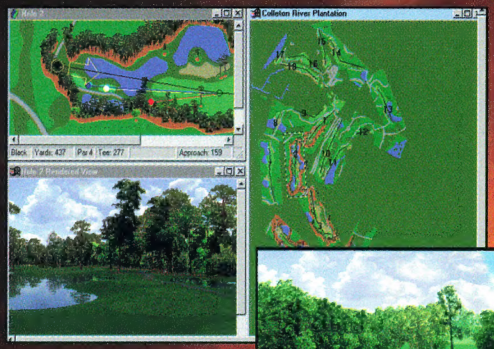
Featuring *Colleton River Plantation, Country Club of the South, Muirfield Village, Cabo del Sol,* and *Winding Springs.*

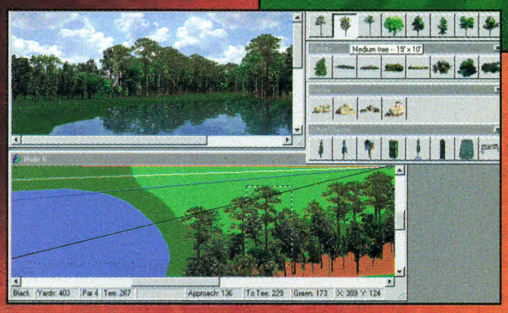
The Course Designer



This is the Course Designer that created all 5 Nicklaus-designed courses in the game!

Use the Designer to re-create your favorite course! Import, modify, and play courses from previous Nicklaus games!

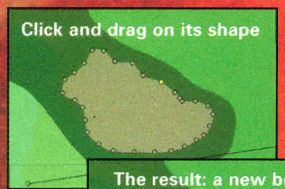
Input the basic details of a course from a real scorecard–the "Wizard" automatically routes each hole.



"Is it live or is it...?" Our Course Designer is so true-to-life, it's hard to tell the difference!

This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.

Choose from over 100 different types of trees, bushes, rocks, and other objects!



Click and drag on its shape

Choose from a variety of templates, or create your own shapes. Changing terrain is as easy as click-and-drag.

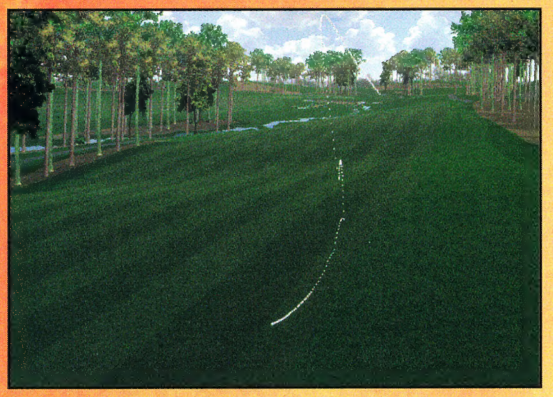
The result: a new bunker

The Hole View of the new bunker.

From Tee to Green

The Tee Shot

Pop-up displays are optional– leave them off for the purest golfing experience.

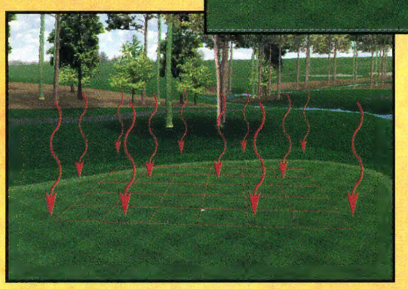


The fastest screen redraw times on the PC allow the camera to automatically switch to the landing in full-screen, from varying viewpoints!

Around The Green

Separate chipping and putting meters maximize control around the green.

Our new approach makes putting more realistic. Mow lines on the green help you read the contour.



For enhanced gameplay, this optional grid floats down and drapes itself over the green, clearly showing all high and low spots.

The Approach Shot

New "Intensity Control™" reproduces the dynamics that shape the shot. "Club up and swing easy" for control or a low trajectory; "swing hard" when you want spin and distance.

Every shot flies, bounces, and rolls true to the game, with the best ball physics model in existence. Courses are accurate to within 6 inches!

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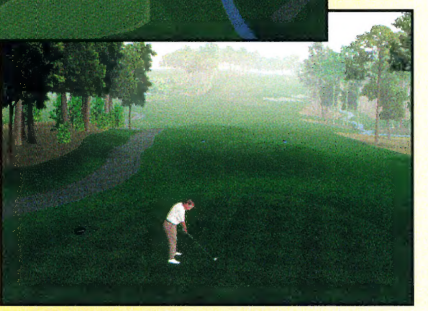

Weather can change in the middle of the round, and natural wind variations and every possible turf condition add to the challenge!

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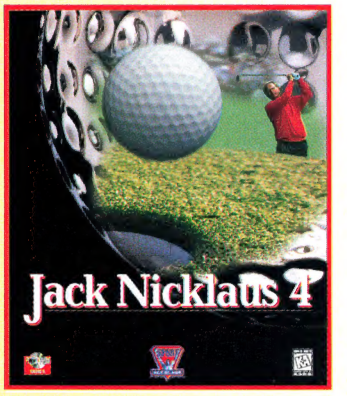
Look for the Jack Nicklaus 4 playable demos in select magazines, online at **http://www.accolade.com** *or at your local retailer.*

For hints and tips on Accolade products, call Accolade Direct 1-900-454-HINT. $0.99/minute. If you are under 18, please get your parents' permission before making this call.



PC CD-ROM WINDOWS 95

SOLO PLUS MODEM SERIAL LAN INTERNET

ACCOLADE

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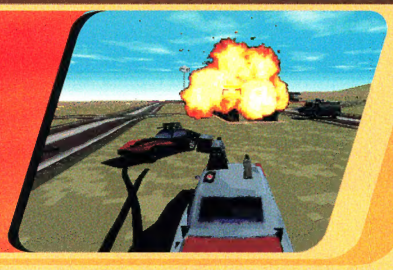
All New for

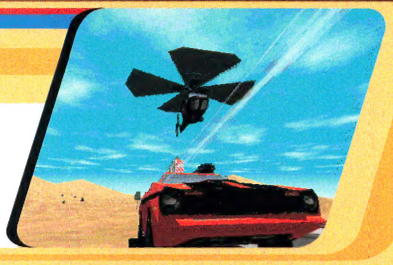
The Limited Edition Vigilante Package

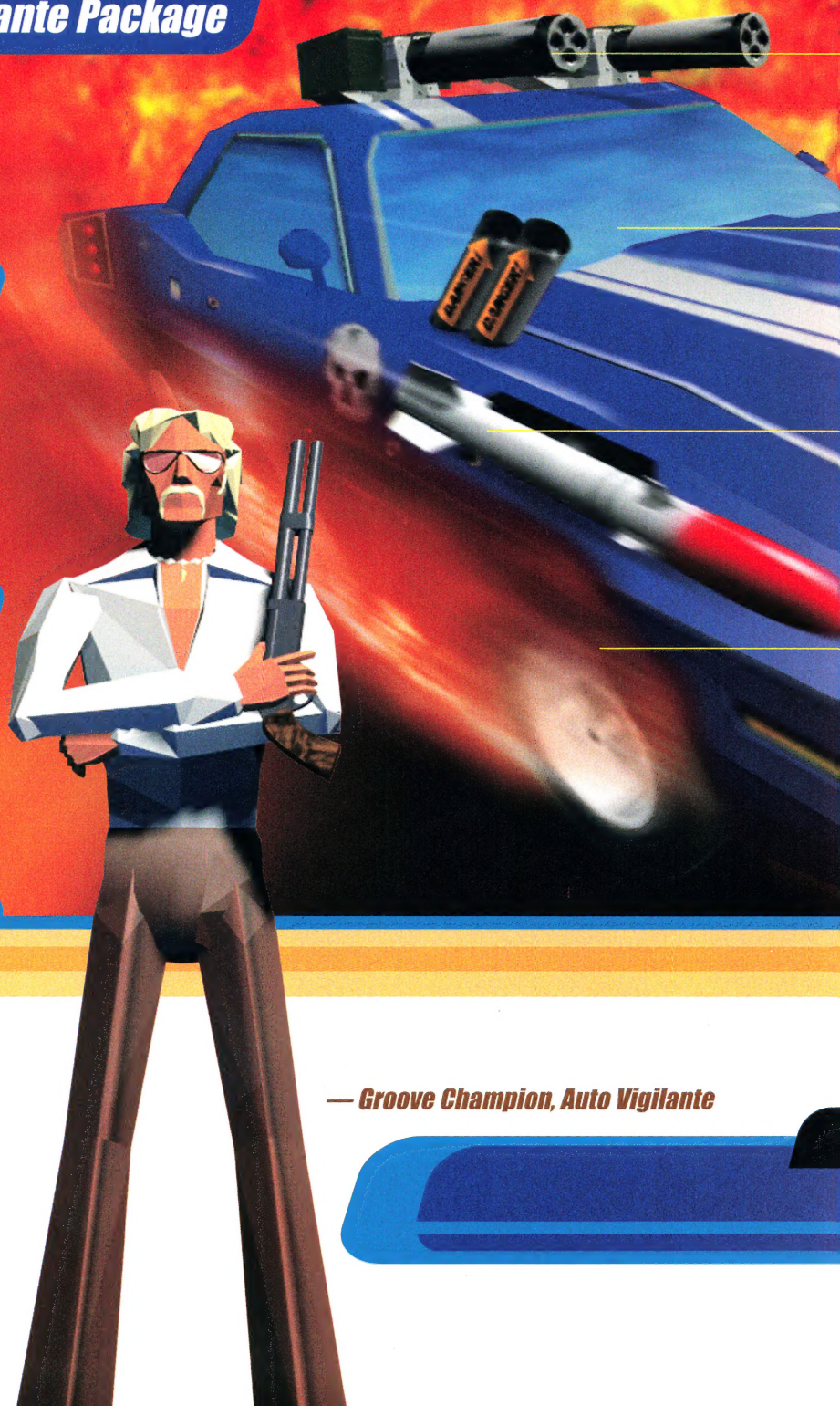
Trackless environments give a rush more driving than a funkadelic beat.



Over 30 wicked missions, plus LAN and modem combat meaner than an icy head freeze.

Multi-camera angles offer views wider than Groove's lapels.

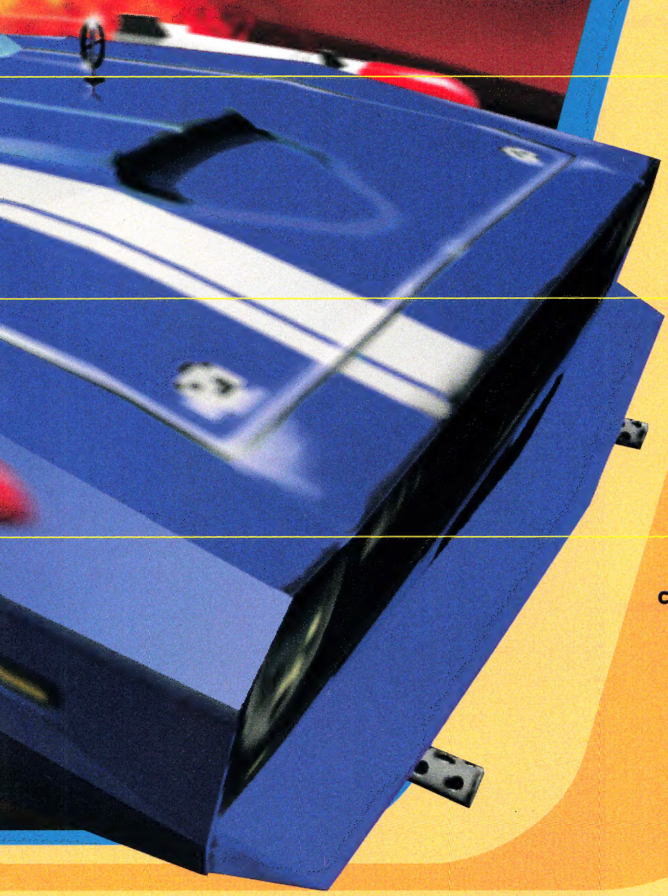




— Groove Champion, Auto Vigilante

ACTIVISION

'76



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What's Inside

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More than 50 years after the war's end, the great aerial battles of World War II are still being fought every day—online. Joystick jockeys have more chances than ever to take to the skies in search of their ace's wings. Here's a look at five flight sims in the air or on the runway.

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Thousands of you already know the score: There's more places to play online, right now, than ever—and there's still more coming. *PC Games* dials you into the details of gaming's newest frontier, with looks at multi-game services and innovative company sites.

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Do you feel The Force? The much-anticipated Jedi Knight will give you the opportunity—and you'll be able to wield it against other humans. Senior reviews editor Rob Smith went to the LucasArts ranch to get the details in this exclusive guided tour; he gives you the full dope on this *Star Wars* offering, including looks at its environments and exclusive details on its multiplayer capabilities.

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▼ Emperor of the Fading Sun

REVIEWS
▼ Archimedean Dynasty
▼ Rebel Moon Rising

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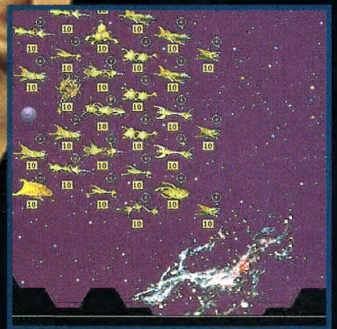

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http://www.pcgames.com

PLAY THE DEMO ON
PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

EDITOR'S NOTE

STEVE KLETT

Feel the Force

LucasArts is planning to release Jedi Knight as early as next month, but it's more likely to arrive in June. Either way, with the re-release of the *Star Wars* movies, the timing couldn't be better. Like the *PC Games* staff, gamers have been champing at the bit to play this follow-up to Dark Forces, and reliving the movies has only enhanced the desire to step into the *Star Wars* universe once again.

This time—like the new scenes and effects in the movies—LucasArts has something extra-special in store with Jedi Knight: multiplayer capability. Dark Forces veterans are saying "It's about time," but join everyone else in imagining the possibilities of an eight-player deathmatch where each player manipulates the Force.

PC Games grew impatient with waiting for the game and infiltrated the fortress that is LucasArts. Using the Force power of Persuasion, we stole our way into the offices of the Jedi Knight development team, and what we saw amazed us. The group had recently completed its first major play-testing milestone, and the game was up and running on the 3Dfx accelerator board. To borrow one of Darth Vader's lines, Jedi Knight looks "most impressive."

Using the Force power of Grab Stuff, we snatched up a truckload of game screens when the Jedi team wasn't looking that you won't see anywhere else but in *PC Games* (okay, so they let us). Check 'em out in senior reviews editor Rob Smith's story on page 48. (Rob, incidentally, is the only *PC Games* staffer committed to upholding the goodness that is the Light Side of the Force.) We think you'll be impressed, too. After you've read the story, visit our Web site at **www.pcgames.com** for even more images from the game.

Once you've received your fill of the Force, at least for now, you'll want to check out all the online gaming goodies *PC Games* brings you this month. There's a bunch of new World War II flight sims heading to the virtual online skies, as well as some major updates to some of your old favorites. Rest assured, these sims will offer something for pilots of all levels of experience (see "Log On & Lock On," page 35).

Besides flying, new ways to game online are cropping up every day from all kinds of sources. Features editor Don St. John got lost in cyberspace for days and found 23 more ways to satiate your hunger to compete online (see "Play With Strangers," page 42).

And if you're into multiplayer gaming—both online and via modems and LANs—you'll be missing out if you don't visit the newly launched Battlezone on our Web page. Battlezone is where you'll find all the latest info on all the most popular online and multiplayer games. Over 60 chat rooms, message boards, and forums are coming in the near future. But for right now, cruise through the other zones, including Fantasy Zone, Flight Zone, and our sports area, In the Zone. You won't want to leave.

Steve Klett

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Editor
sklett@pcgames.com

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– Johnny Wilson, Computer Gaming World

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PC GAMES.EXE

28 HOT DEMOS

Demo of the Month
X-Car (Bethesda)

Action Games
BattleSport (Acclaim)
Jedi Knight movie (LucasArts)
MDK (Playmates)
Redneck Rampage* (Interplay)
Robotron X (GT Interactive)
XS (GT Interactive)

Adventure Games
The Last Express movie (Brøderbund)
Shivers II: Harvest of Souls (Sierra)
Star Trek: Generations movie (MicroProse)

Arcade Games:
Banzai Bug (Grolier Interactive)

Fly & Drive Games:
Sega Rally Championship (Sega)

Simulation Games:
Air Warrior II (Interactive Magic)
Jetfighter III (Interplay)

Sports Games:
Jack Nicklaus Golf 4 (Accolade) ***EXCLUSIVE!
Jack Nicklaus Golf 4: Course Designer (Accolade)
Links LS (Access Software)
NBA Jam Extreme (Acclaim)
NCAA Final Four '97 (GTE Interactive)

Strategy Games:
Age of Sail (TalonSoft)
Emperor of the Fading Suns (SegaSoft)
Fragile Allegiance (Interplay)

Patches and Add-ons
Warbirds 1.10 (ICI Games)

Online Games
Air Warrior (Aries Online Games)
Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris (Aries Online Games)
Legends of Kesmai (Aries Online Games)

Utilities
SciTech Display Doctor
QuickTime for Windows
Win32s
WinG
Regfix

DEMO OF THE MONTH

X-Car: Experimental Racing

Bethesda

Take to the racetrack in Bethesda's new cutting-edge racing game using the company's X^{n}gine. What's more, for that personal touch you can also jump in the driving seat of the PC Games–mobile. So go on, give it a whirl, and see what kind of pace we're setting.

Other highlights this month include the exclusive first three playable holes from the Muirfield course in Accolade's upcoming Jack Nicklaus Golf 4. And then there's MDK. The promise of something special, as featured in our in-depth Guided Tour in December, looks to be realized in this stunning-looking game from Shiny Entertainment. And, of course, there's a CD chock full of more demos to last well over a month. We aim to please.

Getting Started

Win 95

1. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
2. After a few seconds the disc should autoplay. If it doesn't, use Windows Explorer to find the *pcgames.exe* file on the CD and double-click to run.

Win 3.1

1. Start Windows.
2. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
3. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
4. Type "d:\install" in the Command Line box and press Enter.

Getting Around

From the main screen, browse the list of games featured on the CD and then click on Take Me to Your Demos in the bottom right corner. Featured there is our demo of the month—click the More button to scroll through any of the other games. Click once on the icon for that game to see the installation instructions and other details, then just click to install or play.

In Case of Emergency

Should the interface decide it's not happy with your computer's configuration, it may throw up an error. If this happens, each demo can be manually installed by following the instructions below.

In Windows 95, open My Computer. Right-click on the *PC Games* CD logo and click Open. All the game directories will be displayed. Double-click on the game you want to play and locate the *readme* file for that game—double-click to open it and read the installation instructions.

Most games have a *setup.exe* or *install.exe* file that configures the game for your machine. Follow the instructions to get optimum performance (e.g., rebooting in MS-DOS mode to get the best out of the DOS-based games).

Windows 3.1 users can find all the game demos in the File Manager and run through the same process of reading the *readme* file, then following the installation instructions.

If you experience insurmountable difficulties we can accept e-mail technical support questions addressed to ctou@pcgames.com. or check our Web site at www.pcgames.com.

Runtime 31037 error

If you encounter a Runtime 31037 error, here's how to fix it: In the root directory of the CD-ROM is a file called *Regfix.txt*. Double-click on it to read the instructions on how to run the *regsvr.exe* file. Follow those instructions and you will never be bothered by runtime errors again.

Online Services

AOL: 50 free hours trial

Total Entertainment Network
- Deadlock Shareware Version
- Quake Shareware Version
- Quake Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler

Mplayer
- Big Red Racing Enabler
- Command & Conquer Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler
- Quake Enabler

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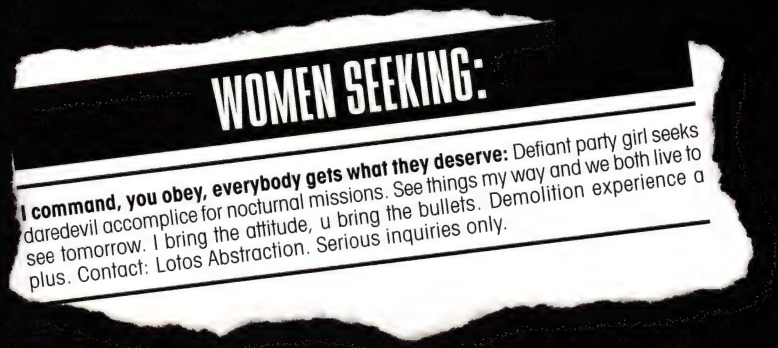
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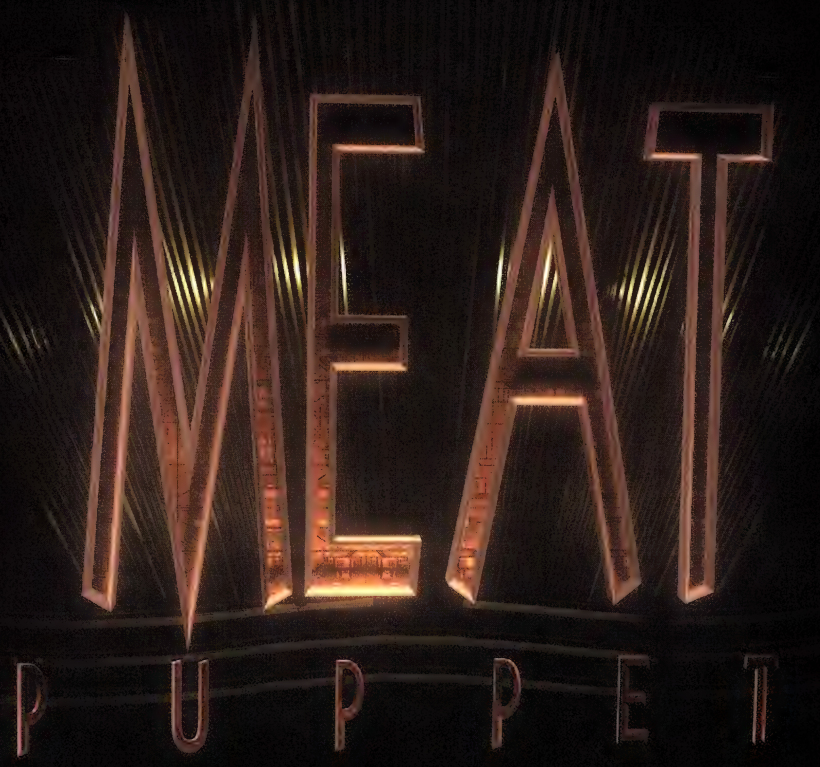

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INCOMING!

Question of the Month: Bottomless Games?

If the whole Quake phenomenon has proved anything, it's that there's no shortage of gamers willing to take a game with an open-ended architecture and spend hour after hour creating new levels, new creatures—even a whole new world. Now Jedi Knight, heir to the first-person throne, is promising the same ability. Do you have an interest in modifying your favorite games? Do you see a game's open-endedness as a selling point that makes you want to buy it? Or do you think the whole "Build Your Own" trend ruins an otherwise "whole" product? We want to hear your opinion; as always, one letter-writer will win a free game and a free *PC Games* T-shirt. Write to us at Letters to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax us at 415-349-7482; or e-mail us at pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Aackkk! Bugs!

Hey, I just wanted to say "YES!" to your "Bug Off!" column. I've played many games—Lands of Lore, Elder Scrolls: Arena, etc.—where, thanks to bugs, I've actually had a hard time finishing them. I can't believe I've paid $50 to look all day for patches that only sometimes fix the problems.

It's crazy. If Sega did this, they'd be out of business. No wonder people are afraid to buy computers. People need to spread the word about which games are problematic and then boycott those games. Make the companies produce quality.

Blake Poe
Via the Internet

I read your column on PC game bugs in your Feb. '97 issue, and I agree with you—to a point. Game publishers shouldn't release and sell buggy games. But we, too, are to blame because we continue to buy them. I personally won't keep a buggy game. If it doesn't run straight from the box, I contact tech support. If the problem is a compatibility problem with my computer and it can be solved, fine. But if it is a design flaw in the game itself, it goes back to the store or the publisher, along with a scathing letter explaining exactly why I am returning their product. As long as game publishers feel their "There will be a patch out tomorrow" approach is tolerated by gamers instead of waiting to release a game, they will continue to do it. If more people would refuse to play buggy games, guess what? Publishers would stop releasing buggy products.

Nancy Donnell
Round Mountain, NV

"Yellow Journalism"?

I just read your magazine's recent attack on Battlecruiser 3000AD (see *PC Games*, Feb. 1997, page 65), where you called it "crap." Well, I can't believe the yellow journalism "crap" I am seeing. If you have a personal opinion, keep it to yourself, because I don't read your magazine for your personal opinions. I read *PC Games* to get news on new games, so I can decide for myself if I might like to buy them. I fail to see any humor in your article, just as I fail to see any news.

It is no secret the game was released early, but you fail to mention why it has so many bugs. I couldn't give a hoot whether Peter Olafson likes the game or not; I want enough information so I, myself, can decide. I'm glad I bought the game before I saw any reviews, because I used to believe what I read. Being a fan, I am offended. There is plenty of news surrounding BC3K, and if the right person were to take the time to find out exactly what is going on, he could write a hell of a story.

This game has quite a unique history around its making and its release, and all you can report on is its problems? Is there nothing to say about the dedicated man who is developing the game, or the support he has shown the fans of BC3K in this situation? What about the cutting-edge Web site, the Sunday chat sessions that Mr. Smart has personally hosted in virtual places, or the fact that the game was released unfinished and is being re-released? I see no mention of its many incredible features, either: the control of fighters, shuttles, and marines; all the weapons and probes; and the ability to buy and sell things on a galactic market. And what about future add-ons? I think there is a better use of your space than to hammer a game into the ground. If it's as bad as you say, why are there so many faithful fans all over the world?

In the future I would like to see more accurate, well-rounded, and well-researched information about games, rather than a whole spew about someone's single-minded personal opinion. BC3K is not finished, so quit giving it such a hard time, or go ahead and tell people what is really happening behind the scenes. Remember to be objective: Media people must take some responsibility with the position they are given.

Todd Hyland
Eagan, MN

As much as we appreciate your feedback, Todd, we have to say that we totally disagree. There's a big difference between a news story and a game review; the first should indeed be objective, informative information about the products and companies we cover. But a game review is just that—one person's review of a game, based on his experience playing it. Not only that, we only review games that either the publisher has declared ready for review or that are actually out on store shelves for purchase. In the case of Battlecruiser 3000AD, our reviewer found the "final" version of the game virtually unplayable, thus the F grade. That's what we'd call responsible: warning our readers not to pay for a game that, in its current state, would be a waste of their money. When BC3K is re-released, we'll take a second look at it. But for now, our opinion stands. —*Ed.*

In February's issue, we asked you what you thought of games based on movies, books, and other popular licenses. The verdict? Mixed, with most people taking an extreme. Those of you who were against tie-ins felt that most of them, with the exception of the Star Wars *games, were fairly mediocre, and that developers should stick to more original ideas. Supporters, on the other hand, expressed pleasure at the ability to play their favorite TV/movie/comic characters, and praised games that expanded on their source material. Reader Carl Lyon had a different opinion, and for that, we'll be sending him a free* PC Games *T-shirt and a copy of Toonstruck:*

I think the issue of games based upon other media should be entirely up to the developers. If they believe that they can produce a quality product based on a hot show or movie, then they should go right ahead. However, if the game itself will be a mediocre piece of software, relying on the images of the film/show/book it's based on, neither the developers nor the consumer should bother.

Obviously, game developers shouldn't bother licensing concepts unless they've got good ideas to back them up, or they risk losing money and tarnishing their brand name.

I won't even go into the mediocre-films-based-on-games fiasco...

Carl Lyon
Via the Internet

Gamers Seeking Gamers

David Hirsch
Davanthar@Hotmail.com

Kunal Patel
kunal007@juno.com

Ben Siegel
landslide@geocities.com

Laolee Xiong
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USB: The Plug-And-Play Uber-Port!

Let's face it—ports stink. For all but the most dedicated PC gearheads, parallel ports and serial ports are a confusing jumble of IRQs and base address numbers. Note for the engineers out there: "Address base 2f8 on IRQ 4" does not constitute simple. Thankfully, the PC Gods (Intel, IBM, Microsoft, and others) have finally delivered. The name of this uber-port? USB, or Universal Serial Bus, and it's already coming to a PC near you.

USB-equipped systems have been shipping since last year from big companies like IBM and Compaq. If you bought your PC this year, chances are you already have USB connectors on the back of your machine and a special USB-enabled version of Windows 95 that will let you run it. The rest of us will need to get a PCI add-in card and wait for the next retail version of Windows (code-named "Memphis"), due sometime this summer.

Market researcher Dataquest expects 50 million USB-enabled PCs to ship this year, and there are more than 250 USB peripherals in the pipeline, from printers to speakers to joysticks of every possible shape and function. Long-term, we can all kiss serial, parallel, and joystick ports goodbye. We say good riddance, and here's why.

Unclogging Arteries

USB begins with speed. The common problem with today's ports is that for the PC, they're like drinking from a barrel with a straw—or filling a barrel with a straw, for that matter. The bandwidth on today's serial ports is 115 kilobits per second. A kilobit is a thousand bits of information. Your "fast" 33.6 modem can't even fill that pipe, running at 33.6 kilobits. And on the bus, inside the PC, bandwidth is measured in megabytes per second, with eight bits to the byte. It's straws and barrels all over the place.

USB gives your PC a much bigger straw, even bigger than the ones at McDonald's—about 12 megabits (millions of bits) per second, to be exact. That's just over a hundred times faster than your serial bus. It's enough bandwidth to attach a couple of modems, an ISDN line, your mouse, a keyboard, a joystick, your printer...and still have plenty of bit-bandwidth to spare.

Truly Easy Connections

USB ports "click" in and out, looking a little like wide telephone-style connectors. There are no screws. More importantly, USB is a "daisy-chain" interface like the ADB port on the Macintosh. You might begin by plugging one USB device into the back of your computer—say, a keyboard. The keyboard itself might have two or more USB ports on it, into which you might plug a mouse and joystick. In turn, the USB joystick you just connected might have a single USB port into which you could attach an additional stick. USB devices into which you can plug other USB devices are called "hubs" in USB-speak. You can expect hub monitors, hub keyboards, even dedicated hubs that just give you plenty of USB ports. USB lets you connect up to 127 devices to a single PC.

This technology will go a long way toward solving another of the problems of today's peripherals—power-cable sprawl. Unlike serial or parallel ports, USB provides some power to attached devices. While the power in a USB cable won't run an energy hog like a monitor or a laser printer, it's enough for devices like force-feedback joysticks and products that just need a tiny bit of juice to get the job done. And since USB is bi-directional, don't be surprised if we start seeing more devices with their own status lights or even LCD displays to make working with them easier.

Perhaps the best thing about USB is that it takes Plug-and-Play technology to its logical conclusion. USB offers real-time plug and play: you can plug in a new USB device with the computer running. This is often called "hot plugging" or "hot swapping." When you do it, the operating system is notified and loads the appropriate drivers. USB is sophisticated enough that in many cases, programs should be able to "adapt" to hardware that wasn't around when the program was first written.

Game Time

Designers at Microsoft are particularly excited about USB's potential to make multiplayer gaming in front of the same PC a more straightforward process. In theory, USB would let others join a game in progress simply by plugging in another stick. All-digital USB means all-digital accuracy, and the exponentially greater bandwidth means controller designers can put as many buttons on their products as they want—no four-axis, two-button limits.

USB also supports "digital speakers." The idea is that the speakers themselves act as your sound card. The result is cleaner, hiss-free sound without all the electrical "noise" generated inside the case. And with USB speakers, there's no conflict between the volume setting on the PC's "mixer" and the volume knob on the speaker—they are one and the same.

If you're buying a new Pentium now, insist on USB ports. You won't regret it.

—David Gerding

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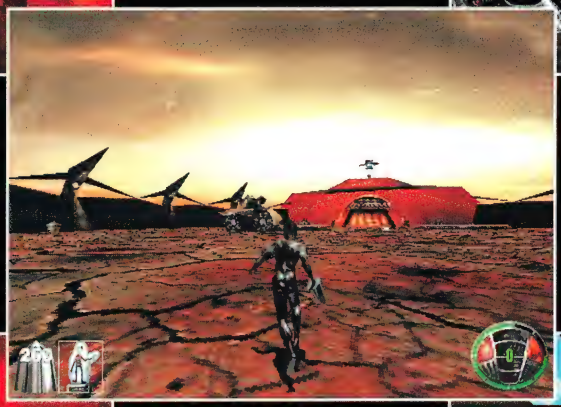

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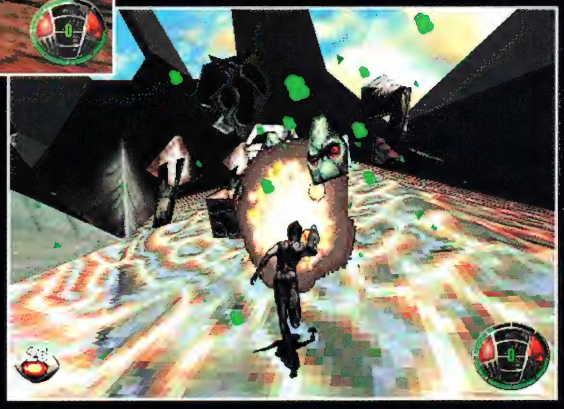

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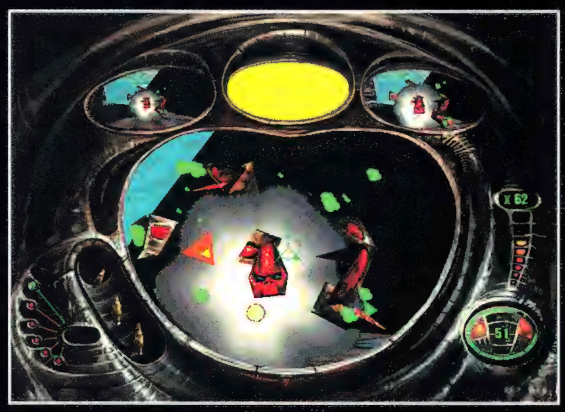

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Not So Fast...

Motorola is one of the modem makers that is boosting speeds.

Online gamers salivating over "56Kbps" modem speeds, beware: Questions about the actual performance of the next generation of high-speed analog modems have already begun to surface.

At least two variations of the proposed 56K standard are now available—the X2 version from U.S. Robotics and Hayes' 56K. Although currently incompatible with each other, the two variations are based on essentially the same technology. As such, they are both subject to the same performance constraints as the U.S. phone system.

Federal Communications Commission rules currently place a cap of 53K on any device connecting directly to a phone network. Because 56K technology only works when connected directly to a networked modem pool, Americans will be limited to 53K and below until the FCC rules are amended. According to U.S. Robotics, lobbying efforts are under way to get the limit removed, but the FCC has not yet responded. Don't hold your breath waiting for modem makers to rename their products 53K models, though.

Depending on the system employed in their country, international users may be able to achieve 56K performance, but even without the bandwidth limit, the technology won't enable foreign users to connect to domestic sites at the higher speeds. The problem is that the 56K technologies work only when there is a single analog-to-digital conversion in the connection, and all international connections now require multiple conversions.

Although commonly referred to as performance-doubling modems (referring to the common 28.8 rate), in reality, the new technology delivers slightly less than 1.6 times the speed of a 33.6K modem under ideal conditions in the U.S. Additionally, because the standard is

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asynchronous, only downloaded information is sent at the high speed. Information from the user travels at the standard 28.8K or 33.6K rate.

Many in the industry believed that 28.8K modems were as far as current phone lines and analog technology could take us. Despite all the hoopla concerning the various new 56K standards being proposed, it appears that the doubters of compression were closer to being right than wrong.

A relatively minor tweak to the 28.8K standard known as V.34 has resulted in a 33.6K standard, commonly called V.34+, but that's as fast as standard analog modems are likely to get. Even with a 33.6K modem, you need to live in an area with great up-to-date phone service if you expect to be free of latency hassles during an online game.

What's more, to get the most out of the 56K modems currently being hyped, they must be connected to a network modem with a direct digital connection to the Internet, and even then, the speed increase is only in one direction. In other words, unless you or your friend have an ISDN or T1 connection, you won't be able to connect to your buddy across town for a friendly game at speeds above 33.6K, even if you both own the latest 56K modems.

When you do connect to another 56K modem through an online service or ISP, you will get fast downloading, but anything you send "upstream" will be moving at approximately 30K, or about what you get with a V.34 modem today. Obviously, this means that latency issues for online gaming remain—the game might come at you faster, but you're still limited in the speed of your response time. And playing a head-to-head game over the modem with the new high-speed modems simply won't be any faster at all.

The good news is that many 33.6K modems purchased within the past seven or eight months can be upgraded through software to the faster download speed, so cost shouldn't be a big factor. The bad news is that unlike V.34, there is no standard for 56K, which means that if you buy one brand of modem and your online service chooses another, you're out of luck. Maybe when we move completely to digital connections, we'll start seeing those wonderful leaps in performance once again.

—J. V. Bolkan

Phone Companies Accused

Baby Bells have been complaining that Internet users—gamers in particular—are straining phone lines and costing them money. But a new study by the Information Technology Association says Internet users are not crashing phone networks, and, in fact, are generating profits for phone companies. The group quoted a conversation last year between Bell Atlantic CEO Raymond Smith and Wall Street analysts to prove its point. "Sales of secondary lines increased more than 50 percent, fueled by surging demand for Internet and telecomputing applications," he said. "The revenue generated substantial profit because we were able to provision new lines and services from idle capacity in an existing plant."

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Darklight Conflict

GAME BYTES

Red Alert a Hit at Retail And Online

Westwood Studios announced it has taken retail orders on more than 1.8 million units of Command & Conquer: Red Alert since the game was released late last year. In addition, the company says it has hosted more than 300,000 multiplayer online games on its Westwood Chat online game service. When TEN and Mplayer are added to the mix, Westwood figures that more than 1 million online Red Alert games were played by the end of January.

New EF2000 Add-ons

EF2000's already-fanatical following could increase with the release of EF2000 Evolution (the DOS-based flight sim bundled with the Tactcom add-on pack) and the native Windows 95 version. But who's gonna show the newbies how to play? Actually, experts and novices alike may benefit greatly from SimTech's mammoth *Official Strategy Guide*. Weighing in at 384 pages, it's received high praise from practiced veterans while opening up many aspects of the game to newcomers. It should be in stores now, priced around $35. Visit SimTech's Web site at **www.sim-tech.co.uk** for more information.

Number Nine Ships S3D-Based Graphics Card

Fans of VIRGE's VX graphics technology can find it on Number Nine's recently released 9FX Reality 772 video card. The PCI board comes in $199 2MB and $279 4MB packages and features 64-bit VRAM-based graphics, a 64-bit 2D engine, a 3D rendering engine, and a Streams processor

Despite the overwhelming success of the Wing Commander series, each game's lack of multiplayer features has left fans wanting more. Enter Rage Software Limited and Electronic Arts with Darklight Conflict to fill the void. This multiplayer space-combat game offers simple yet visually stunning 3D graphics, compelling strategy, and frenetic action.

The SVGA explosions are impressive—note the flared lens and reflection effects.

You are one of a handful of genetically created humans made to fight alongside the warriors of the alien Repton clans. To survive, you must learn and master the language and customs of these strange alien allies; honing your skills to become the perfect fighter pilot couldn't hurt, either.

As you'd expect, Darklight Conflict will offer a range of spacecraft to master—each with unique performance characteristics—and a choice of 15 different weapons of varied destructive power. A spacecraft encyclopedia will make ship selection and customization a breeze. You'll also discover a variety of power-ups, such as devices that allow you to cloak your ship in combat. Darklight will offer more than 50 single-player missions, including dogfights, bombing runs, and turret combat—as well as command wingmen to help you out.

These stand-alone missions are really just practice fodder for the real fun, which is focused on multiplayer network and modem games. In addition to multiplayer-only cooperative missions, Darklight will offer other multiplayer modes, including:

- Deathmatch: one-on-one combat
- Tag: "tag" your opponent to make him or her "it"
- Cooperative: squads of players fly against other squads
- Capture the Flag: teams of players attempt to enter an opposing team's base and steal their flag without being destroyed

For those with the facilities, up to eight players will be able to duke it out over a LAN.

PC Games visited Electronic Arts for an early look at Darklight Conflict, and the game looked promising. The multiplayer modes aren't anything new per se, but they are new in the space combat world (LucasArts' X-Wing vs. Tie Fighter will offer similar options), and should be a lot of fun. Not only that, but the game's real-time lighting effects and sharp graphics were very appealing as well. Look for Darklight to appear on shelves this spring. —*Steve Klett*

Darklight's graphics are a unique blend of TIE Fighter and Wing Commander III and IV.

Sega Buys Bandai

Sega is buying Bandai, known for *Power Rangers* toys, *Sailor Moon* toys, and game software development. This move is to shore up exclusive content for its console and computer games and diversify its product lines. Sega is paying $1.09 billion for Japan's largest toymaker, which just got into the Internet appliance business with its @World machine (based on the Apple Pippin engine). The combined company will call itself Sega Bandai as of October 1.

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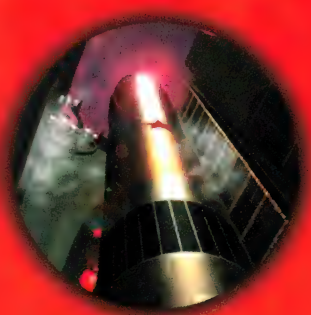

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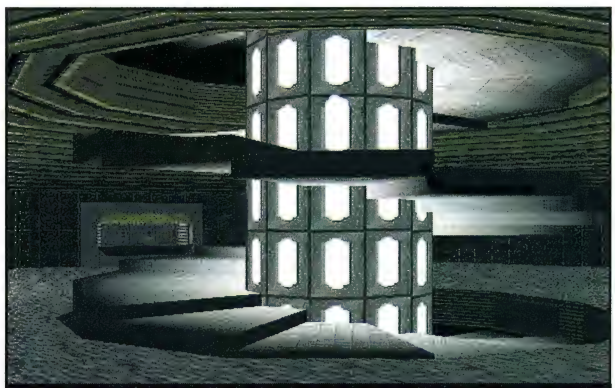
Indie Publisher Has Big Plans for Online Interstellar Saga

By the end of this year, small indie developer AlterNet, based in the far northern reaches of California, will likely have its Windows 95 online-only multiplayer game Phoenix Armada ready for public consumption.

The plan is for gamers to download the game from specific online networks, or to purchase it from retailers with six months pre-paid online hours—details to be announced after online network agreements are signed.



Players will get to design ship interiors as well as exteriors.

But unlike most downloadables, Phoenix Armada will not be a solo-player game. While some people may call the move gutsy, technical director Berry Crawford says concentrating only on multiplayer features has allowed AlterNet to incorporate a more realistic online environment.

"We've been striving for a high degree of interactivity," he says. "We wanted strong RPG elements and a robust character-building mode, an involving and evolving plot to further the adventure in the game, and a well-executed first-person interface for spirited deathmatching."

Crawford says Phoenix Armada is set around the trek of countless human refugees fleeing the collapse of the solar system far off in the future. When their ships reach deep space, they are attacked by aliens aggressively trying to eliminate humankind. If that sounds a lot like last year's *Space: Above and Beyond* television series, it is. But the concept differs in that the survivors from the initial battle regroup into five distinct societies from which they carry on their journey.

According to Crawford, the game provides tools for players to develop these societies with as much control as their characters. Once the correct skills are learned, the original culture and economy can be developed by the gamers themselves. That control extends to weapons, with players being able to design their own models, he says.

As an example of how far a society's economy can be managed, once a prototype weapon has been developed by a player, a factory can be rented or purchased to produce the weapon in numbers geared for war or profit. The same control can be exercised in ship design, Crawford says.

Basic requirements for playing the game will likely be a P100 and a 28.8 or faster modem, he says. "Since we're working in DirectX, a fast graphics accelerator with 2MB to 4MB of RAM will be important as well."

Already, more than 700 beta testers have signed up to help shape the initial sub-societies, with actual testing scheduled to begin soon. "We already have 14 sub-societies in development," Crawford reveals.

Armada's cut scenes are already taking form.

AlterNet has yet to sign any online network agreements, although Crawford says discussions are ongoing with TEN and Mplayer. Likewise, the company is working to finalize a distributor for the retail package. Gamers can follow the evolution of Phoenix Armada at **www.arcg.com.**

—George T. Chronis

GAME BYTES

for full-screen video and MPEG playback. More information can be found at **www.nine.com.**

GT Continues to Expand Line-up

5D Games, of IndyCar Racing II fame, has signed a publishing deal with GT Interactive for the worldwide rights to the new PC space-combat simulation Millennium Four: The Right. The agreement includes console versions and rights to publish the sequel and three other future titles from 5D. Millennium Four features 60 complete star systems for starships to explore and supports up to 32 players on LANs. Network play is built around a "serverless" design for single–solar system or multi–solar system deathmatches.

More Activision Mech

Despite dominating the heavy mechanized combat genre with the best-selling MechWarrior games, Activision has signed Target Games' Heavy Gear giant robot role-playing universe. A 10-year agreement (with options for five more) allows Activision to develop an unlimited number of titles across all platforms. Developed by Dream Pod 9, Heavy Gear has been a success in role-playing quarters, and the transition to the PC platform is a continuing series of giant-robot battles on planet Terra Nova.

Sony Digital VCR In a Compaq

Imagine avid gamers making digital videotape masters of their Dukematches to taunt their friends with. It'll be possible this month, when Sony releases a new all-digital VCR that includes a high-speed port connection to PCs.

Online Gaming Services Exposed

By Daniel Morris

As the online gaming services emerge, PC Games will be keeping close tabs on the major players each month on this page. We'll let you know what games are currently available on each service, which are in the pipeline, and what treats the services are readying for their subscribers. You'll also find updated rates and current subscriber bases. Now you'll have the skinny on which services are charging more or less, offering hits or dogs, and drawing customers or flies.

You'll also find the buzz on what's happening in these online communities in EyeBrowse. (What would the Internet Revolution be without some gossip on the block?)

EyeBrowse

• For an in-depth look at broader online options—from classic game services to new Internet zones being developed by game publishers—turn to our online-services story on page 40.

• Multiplayer gaming at Genie has been put on hold since AOL went to flat-rate charges late last year. Genie execs had planned to undercut AOL's old hourly pricing structure in rolling out 20 exclusive online games this year; now they believe their multiplayer product is no longer price-competitive. No word yet on whether Genie will revamp its online gaming plans or shelve them. The service has more than 20,000 subscribers.

• Everyone knows what the two most-played games on TEN are, right? Maybe not. In total hours of gameplay, the company reports that Duke Nukem 3D and Dark Sun are the current leaders. There's this other game called Quake in at third. TEN recently released its list of the 10 most-played games on the network in December. Rankings were made based on the total number of hours played per game.

1. Duke Nukem 3D
2. Dark Sun: Crimson Sands
3. Quake
4. Command & Conquer: Red Alert
5. Command & Conquer
6. Master of Orion II
7. Deadlock
8. Panzer General
9. Duke Nukem 3D Plutonium Pak
10. Duke Nukem 3D Shareware

• Online upstart Engage Games has added CompuServe to its list of network players. Engage has already sealed agreements with AOL, Earthlink, Concentric, and Prodigy. When the service proceeds with its full-service introduction on March 15, gamers will be able to play Descent Online and Castles II, as well as some exclusive games. Like Mplayer, Engage will use a Windows 95 interface, and the service plans to offer up to two new games per month for both hardcore gamers and children.

• Newfire has demonstrated a new Netscape-Java plug-in technology that is as fast or faster than some 3D game engines. The Newfire Heat player can deliver roughly 15 frames per second, and could enable Quake-style online gaming by thousands of players through their Web browsers.

www.ten.net

Currently Available:
Command & Conquer, C&C: Red Alert, Dark Sun: Crimson Sands, Deadlock, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D and Atomic Edition, Necrodome, Panzer General, Quake, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft

Exclusives:
Dark Sun, Duke Nukem 3D

Upcoming:
Big Red Racing, Blood, CivNet, Confirmed Kill, Falcon 4.0, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, Master of Orion II, Prey, Shadow Warrior, SimCity 2000, Top Gun, Total Mayhem

Rates: Flat rate: $29.95/mo.; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95/each addtl. hr.

Subscribers: 21,000–22,000

www.mplayer.com

Currently Available:
Command & Conquer, C&C: Covert Operations, Diablo, MechWarrior 2 (Win 95 only), Quake, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft

Exclusives:
Q-Ball (when it comes out)

Upcoming:
Battleship, Big Red Racing, Chaos Overlords, Deadlock, Havoc, Monopoly, Panzer General (online only), Q-Ball (Mplayer-only Quake modification), Risk, Scrabble, SimCity, Star General 2000, War Wind

Rates: Flat rate: $29.95/mo. unlimited access, $299.95/yr. unlimited access; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo. ($1.95/each addtl. hr.), $19.95/15 hrs. per mo. ($1.25/each addtl. hr.) (10 free hrs. at sign-up)

Subscribers: Over 20,000

www.axxis.com/kali

Currently Available:
Big Red Racing, Command & Conquer, Deadlock, Descent, Descent II, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, MissionForce: CyberStorm, NetMech, Warcraft, Warcraft II

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Kali works with most new games that are IPX-compatible.

Rates: $20 one-time fee

Subscribers: Not available

www.ariesgames.com

Currently Available:
Air Warrior, Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris, Classic Card Games, Harpoon Online, Online Casino, Stellar Emperor

Exclusives:
Jack Nicklaus 4 (when available)

Upcoming:
Jack Nicklaus 4

Rates: No extra charge through AOL and CompuServe

Subscribers: Over 100,000 through AOL/CompuServe

www.dwango.com

Currently Available:
Big Red Racing, Descent II, Doom, Doom II, Final Doom, Ultimate Doom, Duke Nukem 3D Shareware, Heretic, Hexen, MechWarrior, Strife, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft II

Exclusives:
None (by design)

Upcoming:
Not available at press time

Rates: $7.95/mo., $19/10 hrs., $34/20 hrs., $59/40 hrs. (5 free hrs. at sign-up)

Subscribers: Not released

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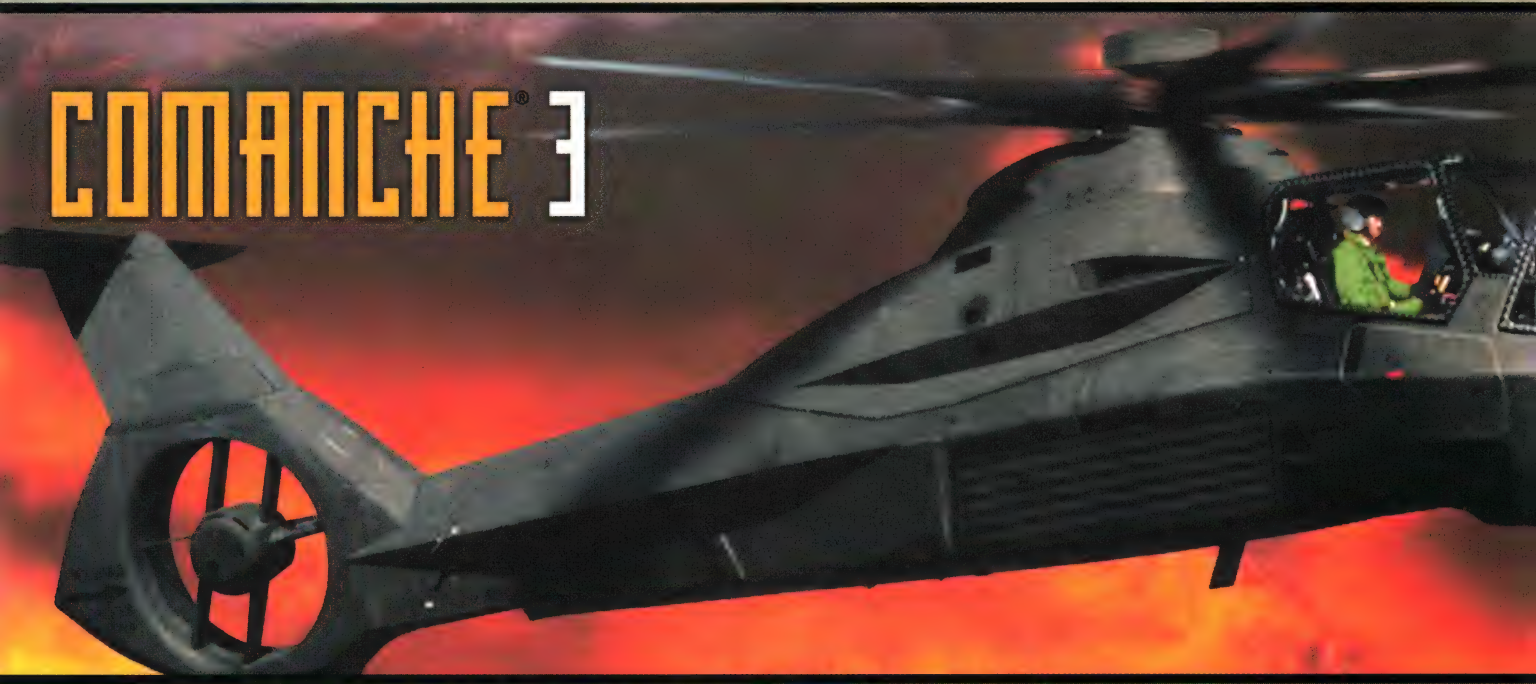

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- Denny Atkin
Computer Gaming World

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- Glenn Broderick
Computer Player

"Easy to play and still over the top in battle situations, not only will this version [Comanche 3] be plain fun, it'll look as fabulous upon arrival as the original Comanche did."
- Computer Games Strategy Plus

"Still pictures can't do justice to the smoothness and beauty produced by Voxel Space 2. Players will have to see the game [Armored Fist 2- M1A2 Abrams] for themselves to appreciate just how groundbreaking NovaLogic's 3D engine really is."
- Next Generation

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NOVALOGIC - THE ART OF WAR™

STEVE KLETT

3D Daze

The Spitfire in Eidos' upcoming Confirmed Kill couldn't look this good without hardware acceleration.

"To 3D or not to 3D?"

3Dfx support brings some cool effects to Quake, including translucent water.

If Shakespeare were alive today, The Player just knows that's the eternal question he'd be asking. Why? Well, The Player believes Will would be a gamer, and would doubtless be thinking of ways to turn his plays into games—using the hottest 3D graphics-acceleration hardware to enhance their dramatic effect, of course.

Trouble is, it's not all that easy to determine which of the plethora of cards piling into the marketplace is the hottest (although it's clear that the 3Dfx and Vérité-based boards are the most popular at the moment). Assuming you can make that choice, finding one that works reliably with all the new games you want to play, and with your old DOS favorites, can be equally daunting.

When the first crop of 3D cards hit the shelves, The Player sat down on a weekend with most of 'em—three Rendition Vérité-based boards (Sierra's Screamin' 3D, Intergraph's Reactor, and Creative Lab's 3D Blaster) and the two 3Dfx boards based on the Voodoo Graphics chipset (Diamond's Monster 3D and Orchid's Righteous 3D). His goal: to find the card that worked the best with his system, and worked the best with Activision's Direct 3D game HyperBlade, which he was supposed to review.

Piece of cake for a hard-core, technically versed gamer like The Player, right? Not exactly.

He couldn't get HyperBlade to recognize the 3Dfx boards at all, and he could only get the Rendition boards working intermittently. Frustrating? You bet. Review deadline aside, The Player couldn't wait to start 3D gaming—he'd heard all the talk in the game forums online about how awesome it was, and he'd seen the demos. It was time to play. Eventually, he found that one particular Rendition board worked somewhat reliably if he kept reinstalling the drivers every time HyperBlade failed to recognize the Vérité chip. Strange.

Stranger still, calls and questions during the following weeks to all the cardmakers and the game developers provided different answers. The boardmakers tended to say it was the game's fault, or the instability of Microsoft's Direct 3D; meanwhile, the game's tech-support line said the problems were related to the card's drivers. In short, everyone pointed fingers at someone else.

Yeesh. How about taking some responsibility, guys? After all, you're asking people to lay out $200 or so for an accelerator card, not to mention an average of $60 for each game...which brings The Player back to the larger question: "To 3D or Not to 3D?"

The 3D hardware hitting the streets is exciting, bringing never-before-seen graphics and special effects to the computer screen. Accelerated HyperBlade is impressive, as are games such as Hellbender, Tomb Raider, and MechWarrior 2; their visuals easily blow away the best the consoles have to offer. However, the 3D market is new, and early adopters need to have the patience to tweak the hardware, as well as the persistence to keep checking for and installing updated drivers when they're available.

David Jones, group product manager for ATI Technologies, puts it best: "We're in the Model-T times of 3D right now, and it's only going to get better."

The Player hopes that as the cards' capabilities improve, the support of the companies making them will as well. To be fair, a big part of the problem right now is feature holes in the current version of Direct 3D—the Microsoft API that is supposed to keep game programmers from needing to write support for specific cards in their games.

For example, ICI, maker of the online flight sim Warbirds (see "Log On & Lock On," page 35), is one of many developers avoiding the hassles by adding direct support for specific cards rather than going the Direct 3D route. Why? "Because Direct 3D sucks rocks," ICI president Dale Addink says quite emphatically.

Chances are, you'll continue to see gamemakers like ICI and id Software only supporting a few cards (Quake currently supports the Rendition and 3Dfx boards). If cardmakers pony up the dough, some developers will write a version of their game for just about every card imaginable: The Player's lost count of all the versions of MechWarrior 2 out there for the different cards, for example.

The cards and drivers are getting better nearly every day. For instance, The Player is quite happy (at least for the moment) with the performance of the Rendition Vérité-based board in his system at home, and with the 3Dfx board in his machine at work. Display conflicts still rear their ugly heads, but far less frequently than when the cards first appeared.

So should you go out and purchase one of the current 3D cards? If you're a hard-core gamer accustomed to fiddling with the guts of your PC, The Player feels comfortable saying yes. If you're not technically savvy and don't want to learn, it is probably best to wait a few months for some of the problems to be ironed out.

As always, The Player welcomes comments at ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

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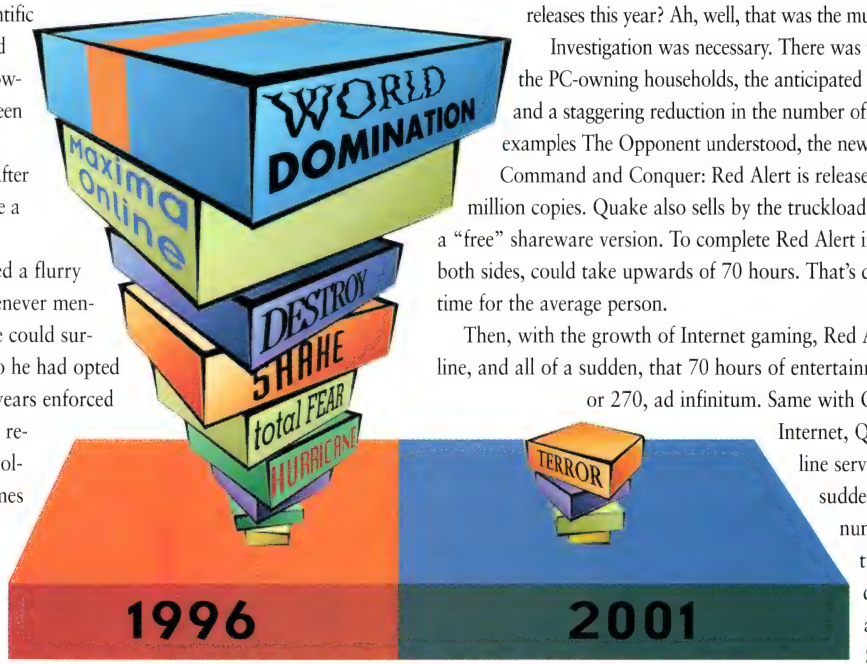
THE OPPONENT

BLADE

2001: A Game Oddity

He stirs—slowly at first, but with increasing certainty as each thawing joint is tested, flexed, and mentally noted as functioning. The Opponent opens his eyes to survey his new surroundings. Anxious faces peer down. Their dour expressions begin to lighten as they realize that the process is working. Life is returning.

The Opponent begins to move muscles and is soon able to sit upright in the sculpted shell that had been his cryogenic home for the last five years. It hadn't been incurable disease or scientific experiment that had prompted this surprising move into a slow-moving, frozen state. It had been 1996. It had been exhaustion. Sleep was the only cure, and after five years he was ready to take a look at things anew.



1996. The numbers caused a flurry of confusion in his head whenever mentioned. There was no way he could survive a year like that again, so he had opted for a radical approach: five years enforced sleep. It was the only way to recover from poring over the collective releases of the PC games industry in that year.

Hundreds of products crossed his path. Thousands, perhaps. A bunch of amazing highlights were drenched by a torrent of remarkably average fare. He had consumed it all, and been consumed by it.

Some publishers had flourished, others had floundered. Developers feverishly cranked out code to supply ideas and concepts new and exciting. New and exciting was definitely in. What were once buzzwords were now standard elements of the language—online and multiplayer, 3D hardware support, Direct3D—they all came flooding back.

The PC games industry's explosion had continued. People wanted to play games on their expensive hardware. And games they got, in the thousands.

Of all the acceptable standards, the online and multiplayer games were the ones that really shined. Be it via online service or straight Internet play, epic battles and confrontations were being conducted all over the planet...

After being fully revived from this isolation, The Opponent headed to the office (stopping off only briefly to grab a beer—well, it *had* been five years). What manner of sight would await him? How many more thousands of games would have streamed in to be assessed, perused, and drooled over?

The first question: It's late 2001, and how many new games have been released this year? 1,000? 2,000? 10,000?

Answer: 5.

What? How many? That can't be right. Do people still own PCs, or has the industry collapsed in a technology backlash? Oh no, PCs still exist, and are, in fact, as prevalent as Uncle Bill Gates promised. So are people just not playing games? No, more people than ever before are playing games. So why just 5 releases this year? Ah, well, that was the multiplayer and online thing.

Investigation was necessary. There was the anticipated growth of the PC-owning households, the anticipated growth of *games* players, and a staggering reduction in the number of new releases. *Que?* Using examples The Opponent understood, the new era was explained.

Command and Conquer: Red Alert is released and sells around 1.8 million copies. Quake also sells by the truckload, and is even available in a "free" shareware version. To complete Red Alert in single-player mode, for both sides, could take upwards of 70 hours. That's quite a lot of gameplay time for the average person.

Then, with the growth of Internet gaming, Red Alert could be played online, and all of a sudden, that 70 hours of entertainment became 170 hours, or 270, ad infinitum. Same with Quake: through the Internet, QuakeWorld, and the online services, that $45 investment suddenly lasted a staggering number of hours. That, in turn, meant that people didn't have to go and buy another game after their $50 game had yielded its 50 hours of value. That $50 was lasting three times as long, if not more.

The upshot of this? Games players bought fewer games and played the good ones that they had, with the capabilities that they offered over the Internet, for much longer than anticipated. Fewer games sold meant diminished profits for the publishers. Diminished profits equaled fewer resources for development. Fewer developments, fewer games. Ah.

Online and multiplayer options in games—that was the future through which The Opponent had slept. Only now did the message he'd needed to impart come to mind: "Think before putting back that copy of Lords of the Realm II because you'd rather join another online Red Alert tournament. You see, the laws of economics may be even colder than my cryogenic chamber."

The Opponent is getting great value out of Quake and Red Alert by playing them online, wherever multiplayer games are happening, under the moniker PCG_Blade. As usual, flames and other comments can be sent to blade@pcgames.com.

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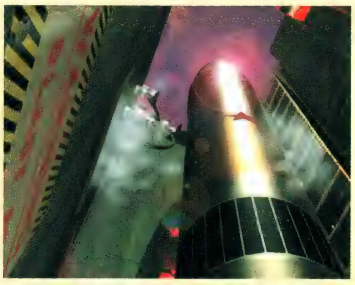

Command & Conquer™: Red Alert™

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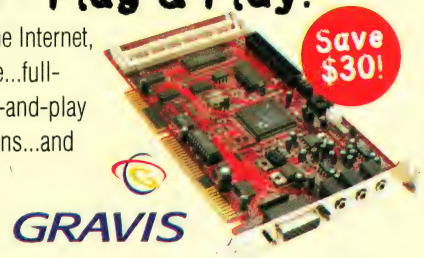

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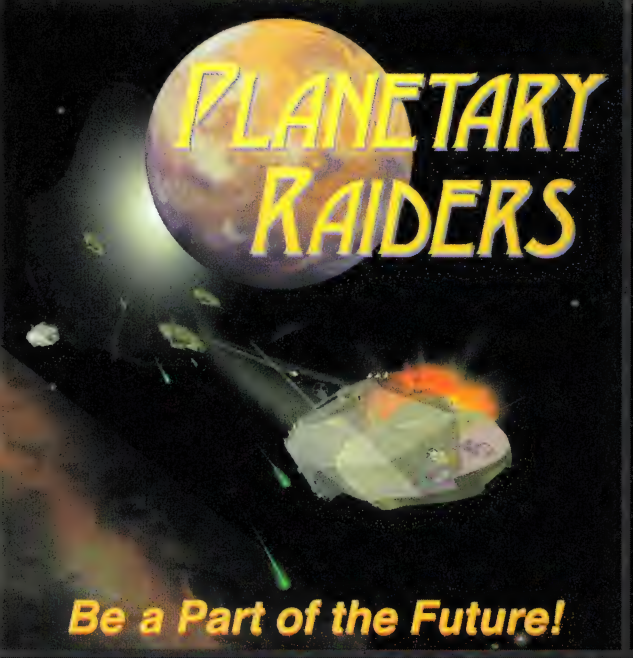

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Log On & Lock On

BY STEVE KLETT

Flight sims are becoming a big online draw, particularly those set in World War II. PC Games *takes to the skies to show you the hottest sims to fly now, and more to look forward to in the near future.*

It seems only fair that the popularity of online flight sims is growing as online gaming is starting to take off. After all, Kesmai's Air Warrior has been around for more than 10 years now, existing mostly in anonymity but accruing a loyal legion of flying fanatics long before "online gaming" became the buzzword it is today.

World War II combat flight sims are easily drawing the biggest crowds, both in number of players and companies offering them. Why? The performance of WWII-era (and earlier) planes is well-suited to the online environment. Their airspeeds and weapons are not particularly difficult for game developers to make work in the latency-dependent online environment.

Flight sims are also ideally suited to the community that online games offer. You can fly with friends on the other side of the world, you can form or join a squadron and fly once a week at a set time, and you can take part in historical scenarios with hundreds of players at once. Indeed, many long-lasting personal friendships have been formed among Air Warrior pilots over the years. Flight-sim aficionados are also quite fanatical, and you'll find hundreds of Web pages devoted to games such as Air Warrior and Warbirds.

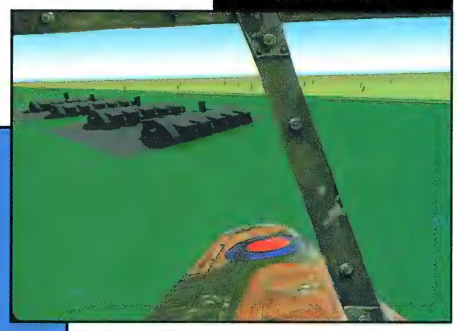
The result is that some of the most playable, technologically sexy online games available are the new breed of WWII online flight sims. Two are currently commercially available online—Kesmai's Air Warrior For Windows and Interactive Creations' Warbirds—and three more are on the way: Kesmai's Air Warrior II, VR-1's Air Attack, and Pro-Line Software's Tactical Aero Squadron. Each is similar in that it seeks to re-create the thrill of aerial combat in World War II, but each also tries to bring a different kind of experience to the table and targets different types of computer pilots.

AIR WARRIOR II

freeplay.kesmai.com

Air Warrior II features new cockpit art that replicates real-life aircraft.

The terrain looks better in Air Warrior II, but it's still far from revolutionary.



A Warbirds Ju-88 begins a bombing run on some sitting ducks—the plane's specialty.

PC Games brought you the world exclusive last May on Kesmai's plans for its major overhaul of the original Air Warrior and Interactive Magic's plans to publish a boxed version. Now, Air Warrior II is finally online and flyable in a free public beta via Kesmai's Aries Online Gaming service.

Air Warrior II differs from the rest of the online sims—at least for the moment—in that it doesn't just focus on WWII aircraft, but also offers WWI and Korean War aircraft to fly. In all, there are 27 aircraft to choose from, ranging from the Fokker Dr.I Triplane and Sopwith Camel of WWI to the B-17 bomber, Focke-Wulf 190, Spitfire, and P-51 of WWII to the F-86 Sabre and MiG-15 of the Korean War. You can also man ground-based vehicles such as jeeps, tanks, and trucks if you get a little airsick.

In addition to new SVGA cockpit art, the boxed version of Air Warrior II will offer an extensive but easy-to-use mission editor that will allow flyers to plan online missions in the peace and quiet of their offline home, then upload them to squadron mates online. Pilots can then call up the mission plan in the air as needed. This eliminates the boredom of multiple players having to sit around and wait while their leaders try to organize a sortie.

Air Warrior II also features a new terrain system with Gouraud-shaded ground, more realistic buildings and airfields, and new campaign areas such as the Solomon Islands and Pearl Harbor. When you get close to the Pacific Ocean during play, you'll be able to look out of the cockpit and see whitecaps on the waves below, or trees as you get closer to the ground. This is welcome news for Air Warrior veterans, who are used to rather bland-looking terrain.

You don't need hundreds of hours of online experience to fly Air Warrior II—just the desire to take to the skies. The game offers adjustable levels of difficulty to suit beginners as well as veterans.

The stand-alone boxed version of Air Warrior II is being published by Interactive Magic and is on store shelves now. The boxed copy will offer more than 300 missions, 6 campaigns, and a mission editor, which can be used online as well. The boxed version is not needed to fly online, as a free downloadable front-end for Air Warrior II is available; however, it will allow you to practice at home and hone your skills before venturing into the unfriendly virtual skies.

To play Air Warrior II online, you'll need patience (to read the bountiful online technical documentation and FAQs that will increase your odds for survival) and a CompuServe or EarthLink Internet account. (Pricing had not been established at press time.)

Notice something missing? Air Warrior II will not be available initially on AOL, which plays home instead to Air Warrior For Windows (AOL Keyword: Air Warrior), Kesmai's major overhaul of the original DOS version of Air Warrior for the Windows platform. The dated DOS version was quietly put to sleep by Kesmai with the support of Air Warrior veterans in January, but you can still fly Air Warrior For Windows on AOL. You won't, however, get all the new art, planes, and features you find in Air Warrior II.

You may have trouble logging on, too, as the online skies have become significantly more crowded since AOL changed over to its predominately flat-rate pricing scheme, says Jonathan Baron, Air Warrior producer at Kesmai.

"Air Warrior For Windows did a half million hours last month on AOL—that's more flight hours in one month than Air Warrior had in its previous 10 years of existence," he says.

To Baron, this is only good news for companies offering online flight sims: "Clearly, online gaming is coming of age and people are interested; this is particularly heartening in the flight-sim market, which has been a niche market for so long."

There's a squadron of companies hoping Baron is right, not the least of which is Interactive Creations, Inc. (ICI), creator of the WWII online sim Warbirds—the only other commercial competitor to Air Warrior at the moment. (ICI recently merged with Interactive Magic to bring a gaggle of games online; see "Play With Strangers," page 42.)

WARBIRDS

www.icigames.com

First released in December 1995 and winner of *PC Games*' Online Game of the Year for 1996, Warbirds is a pure WWII flight sim—no other planes from any other era are modeled. Mass aerial conflicts are the name of the game here: You will routinely find upwards of 200 people in its skies at any given time, flying more than 20 different types of planes. Most of the classics are here, including the P-51, F4U Corsair, B-17, Bf 109, Focke-Wulf, P-38, and the Hellcat.

Players choose to fly for one of four teams, or "countries": red, green (frogs to vets), gold, and purple (Grapes to vets). You pick a country, choose a plane, pick an airfield, and you're off—instantly part of a massive struggle for territory. The goal in Warbirds is to help your country take over enough enemy airfields to "win the war," after which everything resets and starts all over again. Tons of stats are tracked on the server, including kills, deaths, and ditches—which are then computed for an overall efficiency rating.

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Some games not available
on some services.

Newbies who don't "check six" are often pigeons for Warbirds veterans.

The slow but sturdy American Wildcat will soon join Warbirds' skies.

In Air Warrior, the combat is fairly realistic in the sense that you typically have to hunt a while for your prey. Not so in Warbirds: When you log on, you'll likely find a full-scale furball raging overhead as you taxi to take-off.

"We're going for extremely close-in play with lots of people at once," says Dale Addink, president and CEO of ICI. "We want to re-create the realistic feel of flight and close-in dogfighting."

This can be more than a bit scary to newbies who continually get killed before they even have a chance to learn the basics. Warbirds does offer extensive online instruction and multiple game arenas with varying levels of realism. However, you will find more than 90 percent of Warbirds players in the arena with the highest realism settings. So newbies playing in the lower-realism arenas may find the action a little dull—but at least it's relatively safe.

The current version of Warbirds at press time was 1.10; version 1.11 should be out when you read this, and it will offer some cool new toys. For example, one knock against Warbirds in comparison to Air Warrior is that you can only have one human player in a plane at a time. Air Warrior allows multiple people to fly in a bomber as pilots and gunners. Version 1.11 will bring this option to Warbirds for the first time, providing the same number of "seats" for players as were available in the real planes. This opens up the game a lot more for people who haven't flown much but might want to take part in a sortie as a gunner, which can be exhilarating in its own right.

The upgrade will also bring two, possibly three, new aircraft to the battle: the German Ju 88, the American P-47, and the American F4F Wildcat (this one may not make the 1.11 release, but will arrive shortly thereafter). ICI is also planning to release a head-to-head version of the Warbirds front-end that will allow people to fly one-on-one dogfights with all the Warbirds aircraft. The head-to-head game may also include live audio support to let you ham it up with your opponent as you shoot him down.

Version 1.11 will be followed by Version 2.0, featuring an all-new terrain engine, perhaps as early as mid-April. All the planes will look and fly the same, but you'll get a spanking new graphical user interface system to replace the cumbersome text-based system, plus lots of new eye candy: rolling terrain, shaded horizon, blinding effects with the sun, and canopy-glare effects.

This will be followed in mid-May with 3Dfx support providing full texture-mapping for all the planes and terrain, which should greatly enhance the look and immersive feel of the game.

CONFIRMED KILL

www.eidosinteractive.com/ck/ck.html

Eidos' Confirmed Kill could arrive on the scene toward the end of this year exclusively on the Total Entertainment Network online gaming service. Originally under development by Eidos predecessor Domark and ICI, Confirmed Kill has endured an unsettled past that has delayed its development—and lessened the desire of its current developers to divulge many details about it until it's finished.

Confirmed Kill—CK, as it is known online—is a multiplayer online flight sim set in WWII that will model most of the well-known aircraft from the major world powers. In that sense, it's similar to both Air Warrior and Warbirds, but Eidos simulations producer Bryan Walker has many differentiators planned for Confirmed Kill, and *PC Games* got him to spill a few.

The primary difference between CK and its competition is that it is mission-based, whereas both AW and Warbirds are known more as "persistent arenas," meaning there's always a massive battle going on with little organization and players jumping in and out at will. These all-out skirmishes have little effect on the virtual war in which they take part.

Walker feels such games have play-balance weaknesses—in other words, there's no way to guarantee everyone who plays an even chance. For example, a newbie will often log on to Warbirds or AW to find his airfield under attack, often dying before even getting in the air. CK's mission-based focus will enable two things: the establishment of realistic, measurable objectives for each player and, more importantly, an even starting point for all players involved. Mission areas will be small—pilots will begin each flight within sight of the enemy. However, pilots won't find themselves on the ground, outgunned and outnumbered as soon as they get in the cockpit.

Players will be able to choose from a wide variety of historical scenarios or design their own—you can choose the aircraft, goals, and winning conditions, and even opt to make the planes indestructible with unlimited ammo. Eidos is shooting to have 32 players in each scenario at once, but players will be able

CK's texture-mapped aircraft are stunning. Just look at this F4U Corsair.

3Dfx support will give Confirmed Kill some nice fogging and cloud effects.

to jump in and out of the game at will.

"We'll also have all the technical goodies for the realism nuts," says Walker, a former military combat pilot in the real world. "We're probably spending 90 percent of our development resources on realism, but we're also paying attention to the novice player. It's their money; we want them to play how they want."

CK's battles will take place in three major war theaters—Europe, Pacific, and the Eastern Front—with 10 to 12 scenarios each. Walker adds that new scenarios will be added all the time, and players will just need to download a small 2K file for each scenario they want to take part in. You will also encounter computer-controlled ground units such as tanks, ships, and anti-aircraft guns in the scenarios.

Visually, CK looks like it will give Warbirds a run for its money. Both of these games will have 3Dfx support, and the CK 3Dfx scenes we saw are quite stunning. (ICI wasn't able to provide 3Dfx screens from Warbirds by press time.)

Another major difference between CK and both AW and Warbirds will be the viewing system CK offers. CK will have a virtual cockpit similar to those featured in MicroProse's 1942: Pacific Air War, which lets you pan your view with a hat switch on a joystick, simulating the realistic movements of a pilot's head and neck.

"We're doing a lot to work around the limitations of current flight sims to enhance the immersive feel and situational awareness in Confirmed Kill," Walker says.

TACTICAL AERO SQUADRON

www.users.nwark.com/proline/

A newcomer to the online air wars, Pro-Line Software is taking the ultra-realism approach with its WWII sim, Tactical Aero Squadron. The beta of its first scenario, The Battle of Britain, should be available now, to be followed by a full-scale simulation of the entire European air war, from the Battle of Britain to the bombing of Berlin. Tactical Aero Squadron (TAS) is still early in development, so few details are available. But here are the basics: It'll feature Allied and Axis aircraft, including the Spitfire, P-51, Bf 109, Focke-Wulf 190, and B-17, which will be used to set up realistic, historical scenarios. Considering that the main programmer, Paul Hinds, is a former F-16 fighter pilot and owner of an authentic P-51 Mustang, realistic flight models should be a TAS claim to fame.

TAS will differ from all other online flight sims in that you won't be able to switch what side you fly for on a whim. Once you join a German Luftwaffe squadron of Bf 109s, for example, you'll stay there for the duration of the war. You'll only be allowed to switch at the end of a particular scenario.

AIR ATTACK

www.vrl.com

Where TAS is trying to be the ultimate realism champ of the online-flight-sim world, VR-1's Air Attack is trying to be the friendliest to fly—and the most chaotic.

At times, finding a battle in AW and Warbirds can take a while. Log on during non-peak hours and take off from an airfield far away from the action, and you may not find anyone to shoot at for a half hour or so. Air Attack wants to be just the opposite—the online-sim equivalent to a Quake or Duke deathmatch.

When you log on, you'll be smack dab in the middle of a massive aerial battle with upwards of 200 players, where it's kill or be killed. About a dozen of the staple WWII aircraft will be included, such as the P-51, Focke-Wulf 190, and P-40 Warhawk, but the emphasis is on visceral thrills rather than ultra-realistic flight models.

We flew an early version of Air Attack at a recent trade show and found flying its planes akin to driving a car—it was that simple. The friendly handling and heated combat were quite enjoyable, but realism buffs will probably opt for one of the other sims. However, if you found the learning curves for AW and Warbirds too steep but still want to take part in some online WWII action, Air Attack may be just what you're looking for. VR-1 expects to make the game available in June on an online gaming service or services to be named later. ■

Players will fire different colors of tracers, giving Air Attack a *Star Wars*–like effect in combat.

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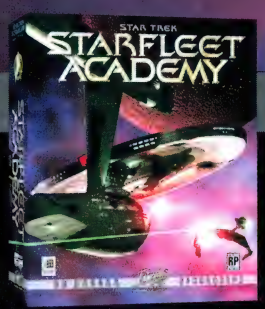

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Online gaming is not just around the corner anymore—thousands of you find that out every night. But what are the options today? There's a slew, and we decided to sort them out for you. After all, we figure we'll bump into you in some fragfest, right?

PLAY WITH

By Don St. John

There's something exploding in the world of gaming. And it's not that Vore you just wasted, either.

Actually, maybe it is. Online gaming—long-promised, long-threatened, and definitely long-awaited by serious players—is finally reaching its potential. There are endless opportunities these days to find someone to match up with online for literally any kind of game, whether it be flying combat, turn-based strategy, serious fragging, or even poker (and who's to say that doesn't qualify as serious fragging?).

Things are still very early in this arena, though, and the places you can go vary quite a bit. Even the field's pioneers, such as MPG-Net, Kesmai, and the Imagination Network, look and sound quite different lately. There are plenty of new firms alongside them looking to pull batches of games together to make it easier for you to find 'em. On top of that, a lot of gaming companies are bypassing the middleman to bring you their own sites. Some are charging, some are free. Some support all platforms, others are Win 95–specific.

So what are you, the gamer, supposed to make of all these choices? Well, that's where *PC Games* comes in. We brought you a look at the newest crop of online gaming services in January (see "Gaming Over The Internet," January 1997, page 75); this time, we went on a full-fledged scavenger hunt—after all, we like to play too, you know? And we found an awful lot of gaming sites in play already and more being readied. Here's what's out there.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Unless you're a hardcore technophile looking for a specific game that you know a company has placed online, or an expert at configuring Kali, you'll be starting off with one of the large online-gaming providers. Lots of outfits are getting into this act—everyone from startups to old-timers updating their offerings, to even an Internet service provider.

Given that, the content and pricing structures vary widely. TEN and Mplayer, which have made the biggest early splashes of this generation, charge to play, whereas Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone doesn't. "We don't think gamers should have to pay three times," says Zone product unit manager Steve Murch. "They're paying for the CD and for their Net access, so this is more of a service for them to be able to matchmake more easily."

Over and over, gaming services say that ease and community are the things they're shooting for, and that any game—from poker to Quake—that provides these opportunities is welcome. "Community is why we got into this 15 years ago," says Kesmai publisher John Taylor. "There were a bunch of us and we weren't in the same place, so we created Air Warrior, and it went on from there."

Quake is everywhere on TEN, Mpath, and Dwango, not to mention QuakeWorld.

The Kesmai of today doesn't much resemble the service of a decade-and-a-half ago. While its Aries Online Games still goes through the popular online services such as AOL and CompuServe, the look is

On MPG-Net, the avatar possibilities are endless.

STRANGERS

certainly different, and while core games such as Air Warrior II, Legends of Kesmai, and Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris are still there, they're being joined by third-party games such as Jack Nicklaus Golf, Watchword, and Aliens vs. Predator.

"By restructuring our company into Aries and Kesmai Studios, which does our development, we can still have our own titles and work closely with other companies; that way, we bring people new games in new categories," Aries CEO Chris Holden says. "This is a community interested in new experiences, and we have to keep pace with that."

In truth, the older online services have *had* to retool as games have gotten more graphically astute and gamers more accustomed to speed and intricate play. MPG-Net, which has been in the business for nearly a decade, has tooled its homegrown games for Win 95, continually adding areas to its flagship Kingdom of Drakkar and unleashing a half-dozen new games recently. But it's also taken one step toward the larger gaming world by adding an IPX simulator allowing subscribers to play any IPX-capable game through MPG-Net.

"We have a lot of loyalty from our audience to the games we have, particularly Drakkar," says marketing director Michele Dipert. "They're very vocal about looking for new capabilities from us."

Ditto for Imagination Network subscribers, who'll find their service metamorphosed into CyberPark, a 3D space that'll let you pursue relaxed social interaction by way of avatars or proceed directly to such games as FPS: Baseball Pro '96, Trophy Bass 2, and Baldies. Don't want to go 3D? No problem: INN will get you to the same content through a 2D interface called GameXpress.

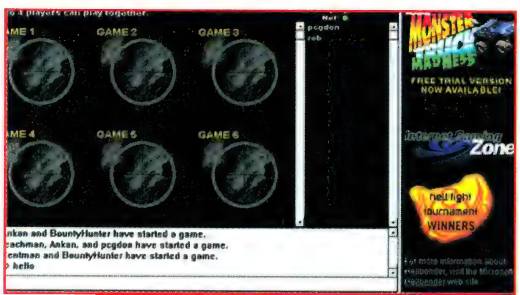
Most of the large service providers also look toward a broader gaming market, offering up variations on popular board and card games such as poker, bridge, and backgammon. INN president Dean DiBiase says that's no accident: "That's a 'sweet spot' in the market that is surprisingly popular. There's a lot of people who get the computer and don't know what to do with it right off, and they usually gravitate toward those games first. Plus, hardcore gamers will play them, too."

Hardcore gamers who want hardcore games have been meeting for years via DWANGO, which now sports some of the more popular alternatives for game areas, including chat zones. However, DWANGO's main attraction is still the ability for gamers to use its servers to deathmatch any number of popular games simply by hopping on and arranging a meeting.

Close ties to certain game developers are a frequent hallmark of large service providers. INN started out as the Sierra Network, and new entry Engage—just out of its beta test period—is an Interplay spinoff with an exclusive on the sure-to-be-popular Warcraft II. But Engage isn't sitting still, either, forging a relationship with developer Interworld to get online originals such as Splatterball, a first-person shooter that has paintballs instead of bullets, and Rolemaster: Magestorm, an action/RPG fusion.

Other, newer alternatives to the service providers are on the Internet gaming landscape, too. Microsoft, for instance, currently features its own games, including Hellbender, Monster Truck Madness, and MS Golf, though Murch says the Zone is not averse to getting third-party content. Then there's the huge national ISP, EarthLink Network, which sports The Arena, an area accessible from its home page. The pay-by-the-hour Arena sports content from Aries, INN, and Engage, and marketing director Brad Sobel says you can expect more. "We want to have the most games you can access from one place," Sobel says. "It's a service that we think is important to our customers, and it gives them a full gaming experience without the hassle of bills coming from a bunch of different places."

EarthLink isn't just looking to serve up reheated content, though, adding such classic community-oriented areas as chat boards and tournaments and ego boosters such as Air Warrior Pilot of the Month contests.



Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone gives the Gates crew a strong online gaming foothold.

MPG-Net's popular Kingdom of Drakkar should have a sequel in the near future.

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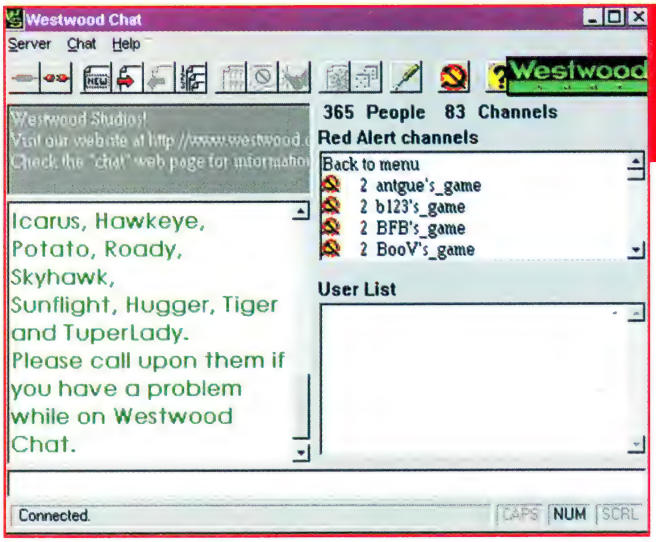
VR-1

All told, there's certainly no end of services willing to pull games together and offer them up for your playing pleasure. But they're far from the only alternatives.

DO IT YOURSELF

Many gaming companies are tackling the online gaming issue directly, reasoning that online play will eventually become part of their core business—a part they want to hold on to.

Take Westwood Studios. With more than 300,000 visits to its Westwood Chat service from Red Alert hounds looking for a friendly little killfest, why should they need a middleman? In fact, they happen to have one: You can also play Red Alert on TEN and Mplayer. But Westwood Chat lays out the multiplay arena for free if you don't want to subscribe to those services; all you have to do is buy the disc, same as you would on the gaming services. (Ditto for Monopoly, too.) Certainly, Westwood is pleased with the results: They're readying the next generation of C&C, Sole Survivor, strictly for Net play.



This Westwood chat action leads inevitably to a Red Alert fragathon.

For some companies, Net play is a new rationale for production in an otherwise unforgiving marketplace. Part of 3DO's bet on a strictly software-based business is Meridian 59, its online adventure/RPG. Similarly, Trilobyte, whose 11th Hour sequel to the groundbreaking adventure The 7th Guest never quite reached the same level of success, is developing the actioner Assault! strictly for Internet play. Assault!, says Trilobyte CEO Graeme Devine, is meant to give gamers "what they have been waiting for: persistent multiplayer-environment games designed for online play."

Others, having seen what Net play has done for id Software's Quake, look to add to the buzz of an anticipated hit by adding a capability for online play. Blizzard's Battle.net is a perfect example: Thousands of gamers eagerly awaited Diablo anyway, but when Blizzard added the ability to war in the dungeons of Tristram online, the salivation level maxed out. In its first three weeks alone, Battle.net had almost 120,000 visits from Diablo players, a figure Blizzard president Allen Adham says "completely surpassed our expectations."

These types of experiences can only mean that more companies are going to try to bring their games directly to you, and in fact, that's under way at several places now. Activision, for example, plans to follow up its brand-new NetStorm (see preview this issue) by bringing online its '70s funk-o-rama drive-and-shooter, Interstate 76. "We'll use some of the ideas in NetStorm, but we think this is the type of game we can take a lot farther," says Activision director of development Scott Lahman.

As with Microsoft, many of the companies are starting out by providing the online play free, as extra value once you buy the off-the-shelf game. That's the case with Battle.net and Westwood Chat, and is the approach behind Sierra's Internet Gaming System, which brings several titles ranging from Trophy Bass 2 to Power Chess to

VR-1's The Sarac Project is a sub sim set for summer—somewhere.

The Wrath of Kahn

Many of you who've become devoted to online gaming have bypassed the gaming services in favor of Kali (www.axxis.com/kali), the ingenious hack that mimics an IPX network over the Internet. Well, now you've even got a choice in that arena with the "final beta" release of Kahn, another IPX simulator that claims even smoother connections via DOS or Windows 95.

Kahn, available at www.teleport.com/~nbright/home.html, aims to cut the amount of traffic your game sends over the network by as much as 40 percent, bringing some previously difficult action games such as Duke Nukem 3D into the potential mix. The Win 95 client is time-disabled software with a registration fee of $15, but the DOS client is try-as-long-as-you-like-before-registering, which will give you a taste of Kahn. Hey, the more ways to play, the better, right? —DSJ

M PLAYER
CyberPark ... from the ImagiNation Network
ENGAGE games online

3DO's Meridian 59 is a long way removed from the company's non-online console-based days.

MissionForce: CyberStorm online. Birthright, an Advanced Dungeons & Dragons–based mix of role playing and strategy, and the adventure Shivers II: Harvest of Souls are slated to follow shortly.

Although those companies figure that they'll get your money with the CD purchase, some are even putting up free online-only content as a way of building play communities. Virgin/Burst's SubSpace (see review, March 1997, page 73) started out as a test of networking capabilities, but proved so popular that Virgin has left it up as a freebie.

However, at some point companies will want you to pay up as they begin to develop games on a Net-only basis or try to bring more intricate games online. Interactive Magic's recent merger with ICI, maker of the pay-to-play Warbirds (see "Log On and Lock On," page 35), is a case in point: ICI already has a pay structure in place that the tandem can adapt to such games as the space sim Planetary Raiders (in open beta now) and I-Magic's tank game iM1A2 Abrams.

I-Magic chairman Wild Bill Stealey loves the idea of bringing the company's line of games to online audiences, particularly huge ones. "We're calling this the Megaplayer Gaming Service," he says. "Lots of companies are doing what we call 'lobby games,' where you can match up 8 or maybe 16 people at most. And we'll do some of that as games warrant. But our main interest is in getting huge play experiences out there."

SegaSoft is also forging into the massive-play zone with HEAT, its new multiplayer gaming network (currently in free, open beta testing, with a full May launch scheduled). Sega is one of the first companies to use the newly licensed Mpath engine, and Peter Loeb, vice president and general manager of the SegaSoft Entertainment Network, says you can expect crisp results: "We're certain that we can have a fast, low-latency action/adventure service aimed at core gamers." HEAT will feature SegaSoft titles; while specific choices are still pending while Sega sees what works in beta, bet on Rocket Jockey as an early and likely popular choice. There should be original content and third-party games down the road, Loeb says.

There's inevitably more on the horizon. Origin is readying Ultima Online (see "Long Live the RPG," March 1997, page 35), and VR-1 has the flight sim Air Attack as well as The Sarac Project, a submarine combat/strategy game, on tap. American Software Games' bowling sim Ten Pin Alley was developed with Net play in mind. And this is before the wealth of announcements expected from this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. You're not going to have a problem finding a place to play online, or the games to play when you get there—your only problem may be the time to play 'em all. ■

So, how do you find all of these gaming sites? Whether it's the ones that are open now or information on those in the works, go to the *PC Games* Web site at *http://www.pcgames.com*, where we'll have a link for every company and gaming service mentioned above.

Westwood CHAT

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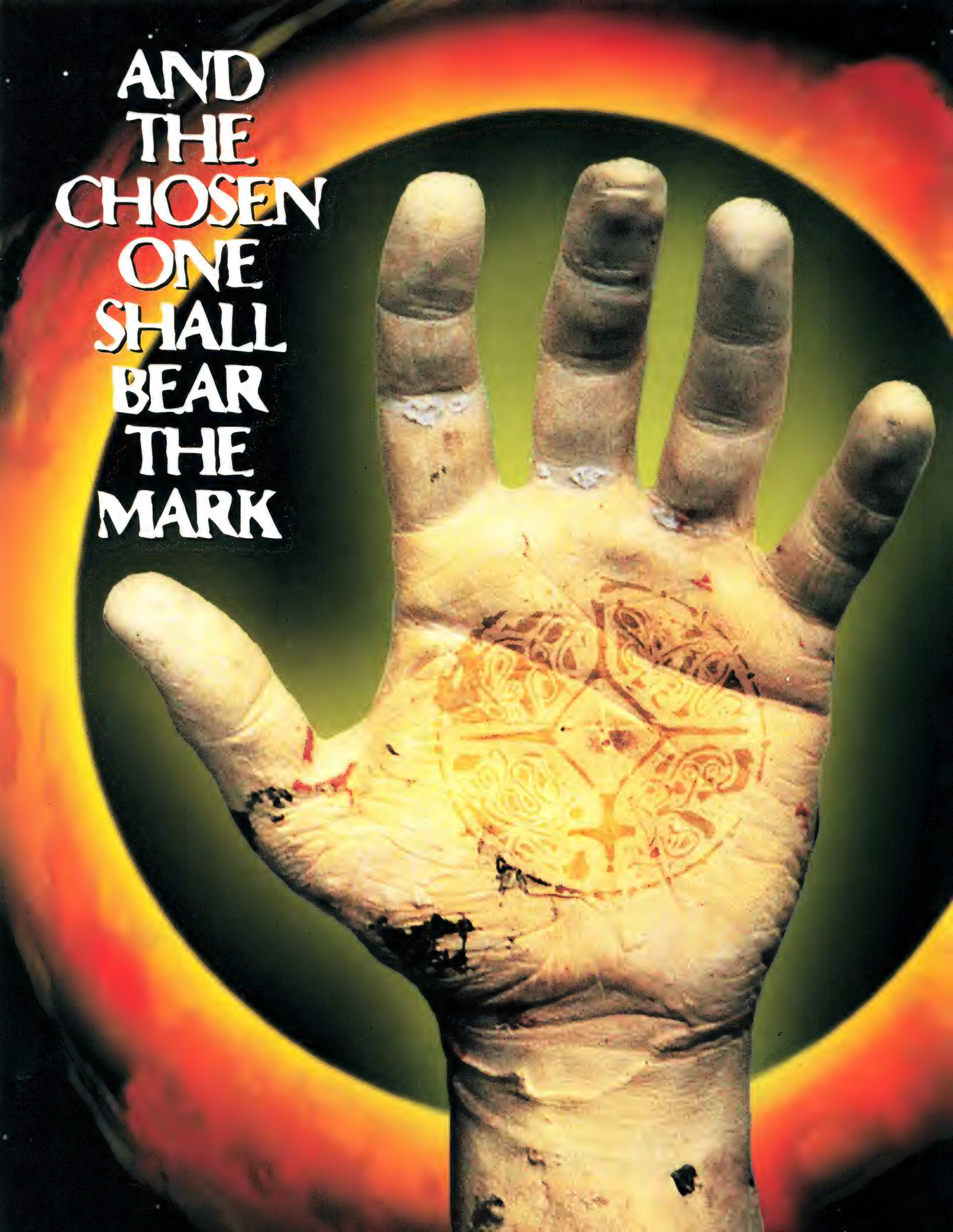
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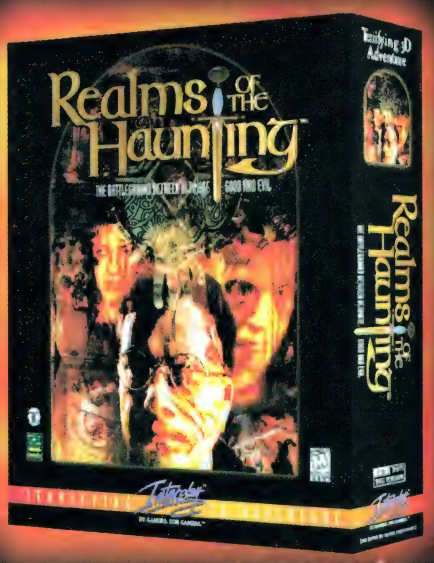

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Jedi Knight

The Force is now with you

By Rob Smith

Detailed textures and expansive backdrops create a totally immersive feel.

Use Force Protection to get out of a potentially sticky moment.

The speeder nips through trenches at an alarming rate...

Quite simply the most anticipated game of the year, LucasArts' Jedi Knight is finally nearing completion. This first- (or third-) person shooter gets the technology overhaul of a true 3D engine; detailed, immersive gameplay; and—gasp! shock! horror!—multiplayer support. Finally, after the disappointing lack of multiplayer Jedi-matching in its predecessor, Dark Forces, you're going to be able to blast away at friends or strangers. It's gonna be pretty darn impressive, too.

Speculation, rumor, conjecture, misinterpretations, and misplaced assumptions have dogged Jedi's development, making the hard-pressed development team reluctant to reveal too many of the specifics that are set to get gamers giddy with excitement. But as some of the possibilities became realities and some of the potentials have been filed in the "next version" bin, *PC Games* paid a visit to LucasArts to fill in the many blanks and uncover some of those secrets.

Dark Forces veterans (of which there are thousands) will recognize the star of the show, Kyle Katarn. He reprises his role of rebel hero as he attempts to prevent Dark Jedi Jerec from gaining access to the Valley of the Jedi—a semi-mythical place similar to the elephants' graveyard of Tarzan serials, where the power of Jedi Knights past is said to reside. Anyway, a personal vendetta makes Kyle not quite the rebel hero initially. On his destructive quest to find the Valley, Jerec's murdered Kyle's father, a protector of this place. That role now reverts to Kyle. What makes Kyle's quest oh-so-special is that along the way, he picks up an understanding of the Force and develops into a Jedi Knight.

That's the premise behind the 21-level battle and exploration, which takes Kyle through some positively terrifying situations in which his control of the Force is all that stands between success and succumbing to the Dark Side. Being a Jedi is what this is all about, which gives Jedi Knight much more dimension than the fantastic-looking but ultimately straightforward Quake clone it could have easily been. "In terms of game design, I just focused on what being a Jedi Knight would be like," says Jedi project leader Justin Chin.

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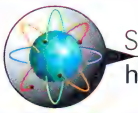

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http://www.pcgames.com

This AT-ST is no problem for a Jedi wielding a Lightsaber.

Use the Force

Development and manipulation of the Force are the keys to battling successfully through the sprawling levels. A set "par" number of Force points is awarded for achievement, practice and awareness. In terms of gameplay, this includes finishing the level, what Jedi things you do in the level, and what you find. At the end of the level, the player gets to choose how to allocate the collected Force points over a selection of specific powers.

Greedo's brothers? One down, one to go.

Time's up for a careless stormtrooper.

A powerful weapon will be more useful against The Beast.

These unique powers are carried over to subsequent levels, so the character abilities of your Kyle Katarn will differ, sometimes significantly, from your buddy's. The depth and breadth of intrigue that this RPG-style character development brings to multiplayer games is staggering; more on that in a bit.

So what are these Force powers? "Most of the powers you've seen in the films are featured," Chin says. "But we had to tweak elements for gameplay; for instance, Ben's persuasion used on the stormtroopers on Tatooine translates into gameplay as invisibility." The designers also added Force Jump, which is "very useful but difficult to incorporate in the engine, because it allows players to get to areas they weren't supposed to, and potentially hit their heads on the ceiling, and even the sky," says lead programmer Ray Gresko. Other Light Side powers include Repel (a shield), Speed, and the ability to pull weapons from an opponent's hand.

On the Dark Side, lightning bolts are likely to cause considerable damage, as is Darth Vader's famous choke power. And there will be more, although the design team was hesitant to reveal too much, since they don't want to spoil the surprise! Finding the hidden Force points will be vital; Chin says that by the end of the game, should you get all the total Force points and spread them evenly over all the powers, you'd fill only a third or so of the total possible power in each skill (although these ratings are also being play-balanced).

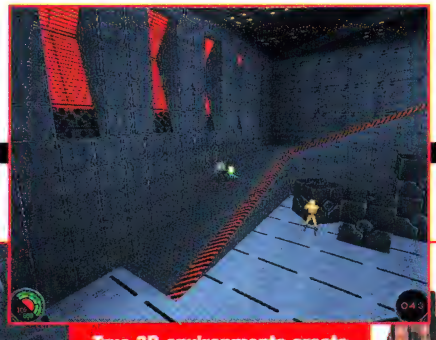
Proficiency with both Light and Dark powers, combined with different physical characteristics for each Jedi, makes the customization of your character a tantalizing element in what is shaping up to be a far more subtle and involved first-person action game than those currently available.

Use of these powers will also vary. Some will be a one-shot deal, while others will act over a certain time limit similar to the way the spells worked in Hexen. Ignore them at your peril. "While you can play without using the powers, in multiplay those people won't be able to survive against those who are proficient in their use," Gresko says.

Armed and Dangerous

In addition to these powers, of course, is an arsenal of weaponry, some of which will be familiar to Dark Forces players. The list goes like this:

1: Fist
2: Bryar Pistol
3: Stormtrooper Rifle
4: Thermal Detonator
5: Tusken Prod
6: Repeater Rifle
7: Rail Gun
8: Sequencer Charge
9: Concussion Rifle
10: Lightsaber



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Gorc and Pic belong to the Dark Side—for a few moments longer.

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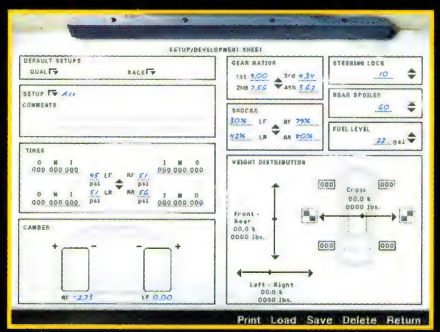

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Of these choices, the Tusken Prod (a lethal cattle prod for keeping Tuskens in line) may not make the final cut. The Rail Gun will cause major carnage, especially in multiplayer matches, as it fires an explosive charge that sticks to its target. Sequencer Charges and Thermal Detonators add a definite strategic bent to the carnage, but the Lightsaber is going to be the dominant force.

Mastering this definitive weapon of the Jedi will be crucial to attaining Jedi status and progressing through the challenging levels. Unlike the clumsy, brutish ax in Quake, the Lightsaber is a weapon of sophistication. After tests and trials with various control methods, the final style seems to make a lot of sense, and definitely minimizes the need for additional key presses. Essentially, it uses a feedback format combined with movement; for instance, swinging and moving to the right brings a slash from the left, moving aggressively forward brings the Saber sweeping down from above, and a backward thrust pushes it up. The Saber is also a handy defensive weapon. After attaining Jedi status, you will be able to use it to block certain energy attacks. The designers are still working on a carefully defined control method for implementing this crucial element of Jedi combat.

Creating Worlds

Building an engine for a universe where Force powers dominate and allow subtle manipulations of the environment wasn't easy. "Our key goal in working on the engine was creating more realistic places—to make it feel like you were on Jabba's ship, for example," explains Gresko. "With all the different locations posed by the story, the engine had to be flexible. We can stand toe-to-toe with all the other 3D games out there, but the real thing is that we've got to allow players to be Jedis."

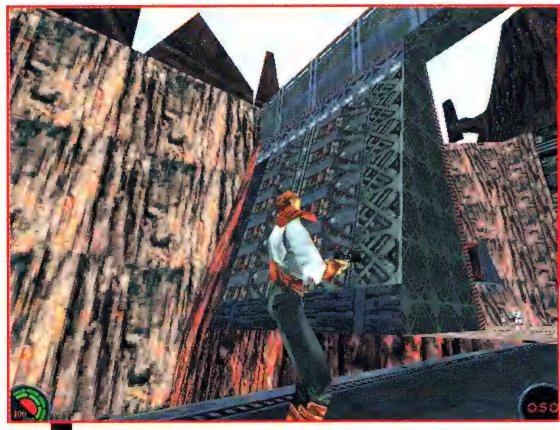
On the realism front, expansive level designs required patches of water to be translucent and girders that appeared on one floor to continue through other floors. There will also be footsteps to add an audibly eerie angle. The characters were hand-animated—no motion capturing—and the death moves are particularly impressive, in that I'm-dead-but-at-least-I-dropped-looking-pretty-cool kind of way. Don't look for a lot of gore here, however. Staying consistent with the movies, Jedi Knight's violence will be of the PG variety. There may be a little blood when you perform expert moves with the Lightsaber, but that's it, says Chin.

There are 26 single-player missions, of which you play 21. The reason is that after level 16, blessed by this time with a particular combination of Force powers, Kyle has to choose whether to follow the Light or Dark Side of the Force. The remaining five levels are different depending on which kind of Jedi you become. Along the way you'll be treated to some 35 minutes of video cut scenes that lay out the story.

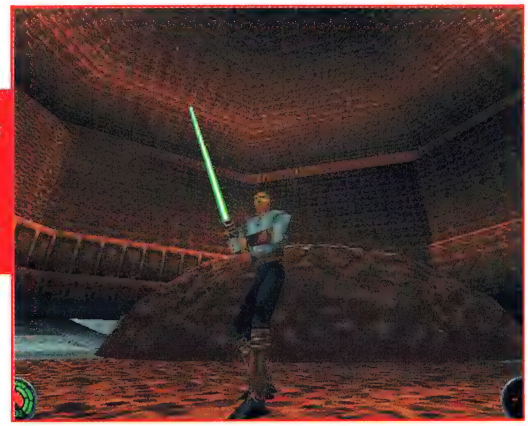
In the larger levels, Kyle won't be restricted to battling through on foot. A speeder bike plays a role in one high-speed moment, and his ship, the *Moldy Crow*, adds another angle to the evolving storyline.

Yes! It's Multiplayer

The omission of multiplay in Dark Forces was a grave disappointment to many, but Lucas aims to rectify that with Jedi. To this end, when they formed Jedi's programming team, they recruited Rob Huebner. He's the guy who created the amazingly stable multiplayer configuration for Descent. If any of Descent's flexibility can be brought to Jedi's amazing detail, the overload of players clamoring for combat is likely to bring the country's LANs crashing down! When it launches, Jedi Knight will support at least eight players over a network. Internet play capability hasn't been finalized, but you, the player, might come to the rescue. Jedi Knight is designed with an open architecture,



Moving camera angles show the full scale of structures.



Huge caverns are well-lit to make great scenes.

Thirsty? Stop off for a drink at the bar.

Battle Dark Jedi Yun in classic saber combat.

In orbit this summer.

The sequel to Relentless (Little Big Adventure) from the creator of Alone In The Dark.

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which, in layman's terms, means that those smart alecks who created Quake patches, add-ons, and enhancements will be able to do the same thing here. Care to develop the Internet tools?

"There are still a lot of people without multiplayer connections, so we won't be letting multiplayer elements overshadow the single-player game, although multiplayer was up and running early in the development," says production manager Brett Tosti. As such, while there will be some specific multiplayer levels in addition to the 26 single-player, the numbers have yet to be confirmed. Gresko adds: "We're transmitting a lot more data than other games, because you will be able to see the different weapons that each character is carrying. Also, when characters look up and down, they bend their backs, and you will be able to see that, too."

In gameplay terms, the epic struggle of Light versus Dark is a prime candidate for mission-based team battles as Jedis fight for their chosen side. Part of the allure of playing the single-player game is the opportunity to import your carefully developed character into the multiplayer arena. To suit the different gameplay requirements, there will be power-ups in the multiplayer version that won't appear in single-play. But you won't be able to develop your character further in multiplayer mode—those power-ups will have a limited effect for the duration of the contest. While Jedi-matches will be possible, other mission-based contests could prove more satisfying.

Think of the Force possibilities: a Rail Gun—armed Jedi walks into a room ready to deal death to an opponent armed only with his fist. The first Jedi laughs before pulling the trigger on the poor wretch, which gives Jedi Two the chance to use the "pull weapon from hand" Force power. Jedi One is about to die. That's gonna be *soooooo* cool.

The importance of the Lightsaber could also make players switch to the third-person view in multiplayer, since it'll enable you to see exactly what the sword is doing. "Once you get four, six or eight players, you'll want to see more around you, so you'll probably choose to jump out to third-person," comments Gresko. This can be done on the fly, so switching to suit each situation should be no problem.

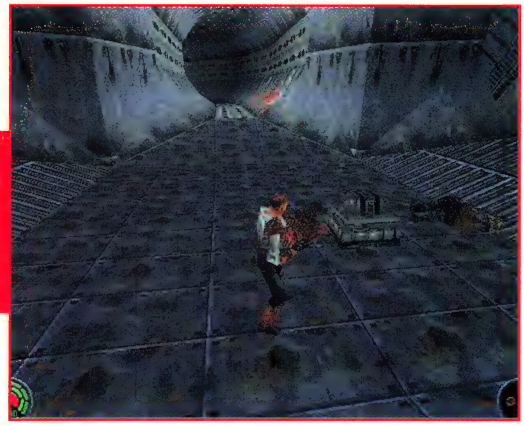
A Universe to Build

The open-ended architecture of the game engine allows user customization of the final game in much the way Quake does. From the get-go, certain cosmetic elements will be adjustable, but the real meat of customizing the game—from level design to new Force powers—won't come until later. Jedi Knight won't ship with a level editor, but Brett Tosti says, "The game will be customizable to the point where players will be able to choose from a library of things, including [but not limited to] costumes, armor, and colored Lightsabers."

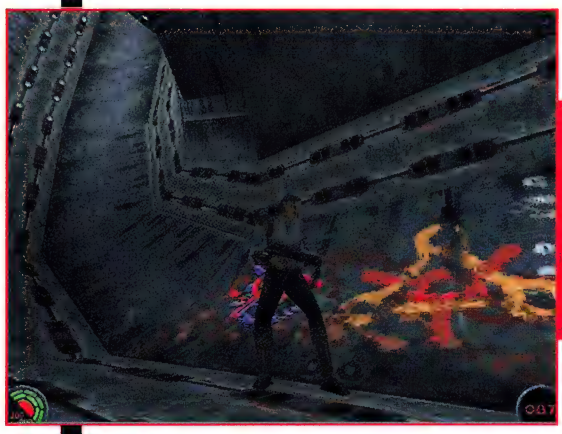
"It's an incredibly fast-paced, changing world and environment out there, so we'll have free downloadable add-ons," adds Chin. "We'll also be responding to whatever feedback we get to tighten things up and make improvements." Chances are, with the game generating so much hype, there will be a significant amount of customer comment right from the release. But imagine the possibilities—Quake C mods have enhanced the game far beyond id's initial release, so consider what could be done with the backdrop of the *Star Wars* universe.

Whatever the case, rest assured that, like Quake, the game you play three months after release (still slated for late May) will have a bunch of embellishments not in the shipping version. That's not to say that the final boxed version won't be great. Everything we've seen so far, from the graphics (especially when they're accelerated by a 3Dfx board) to the level design, weapon style, and even the cut scenes, shows tremendous promise. Let's face it: It's LucasArts we're talking about here. They're not likely to screw up—just think of the millions of fans who would lynch them if they did!

Note how you can see what weapon Kyle holds at any time—very handy in multiplayer.



A Gamorrean pig guard meets his maker.



Graffiti? Didn't see that in the movies.

You're armed and ready with the Tusken Prod.

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Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

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Conquest Earth

Had enough of real-time strategy games yet? Hope not, as a new crop emerges led by the impressive-looking Conquest Earth. Currently under construction by Data Design Interactive, Conquest Earth is going for an action-packed approach backed by some outstanding visuals.

If anyone stops to pay any attention to the plot, they'll find that it's about as average as you can get short of Quake's non-existent story: NASA's *Galileo* probe heads to Jupiter, info comes back before it is destroyed, and aliens head for Earth with conquest on their minds. Ooooh.

Hi-res graphics make the action look great—and the battlefield littered with debris.

Gloriously detailed real-time action in another fight for Earth

Moving on, there's a game here in which a great deal of thought is being put into the gameplay. In typical fashion, Conquest Earth begins with elements of resource management as the attacking alien forces attempt to destroy humanity, or try to choke them via their favored sulfurous atmosphere. Likewise, resourceful humans build their own funky hardware to deal death on invading alien scum.

What really stood out from our early look at Conquest Earth were the stunning visuals and the intense gameplay. It was quite a sight to watch a red-and-white rocket emerge from within a launcher unit, set, and then jet off to its target. The dynamically lit terrains are covered by incredibly detailed structures and units presented in 65,000 colors—a feat not yet witnessed in any other game in this genre. The effect is amazing as the terrains become streaked with bloodied corpses and ashen craters left by explosions of a quality similar to 3Dfx-powered MechWarrior blasts.

Units are moved in the usual point-and-click fashion, but they can be sent via predetermined waypoints and will react impressively to their surroundings if left to their own devices. Strategic use of cameras allows you to view movements in two other areas aside from the main viewscreen—and just clicking a button to move to those portions on one of the expansive maps makes navigation and involvement in an encounter a definite possibility.

To ensure full control and viewing options, you can also zoom in and out of the locations to get down to the detail, or see a greater area for strategic planning.

Combat itself will be nearly as enthralling as a first-person deathmatch. Remember in Command & Conquer how you would keep clicking the fire button for your units to obliterate an opponent regardless of the fact that all it took was one touch to get them going on their own? Conquest Earth puts you in the meat of those battles, with your click rate being the rate of fire. Flying units buzz over ground installations, and rather than firing at predetermined targets, they fire at what you point at as often as you can keep clicking.

Thirty missions will constitute the single-player experience over 15 different terrains, and these missions can be fought from either side.

Funky features such as *Predator*-esque morphing for the aliens add stealth options to the varied attack styles, but the humans will have a few tricks up their sleeves, too. The battle for planet Earth begins in April. —*Rob Smith*

CONQUEST EARTH

DEVELOPER:	Data Design Interactive
PUBLISHER:	Eidos Interactive 415-616-2022 www.eidos.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95
AVAILABLE:	April 1997

Dominion

7th Level has been teasing strategy gamers for months with glimpses of Dominion, a real-time futuristic combat game dressed up in stunning SVGA graphics and full animation.

Our look at an alpha version of Dominion was very encouraging. While not yet fully playable, it showcased a visual feast. The highly detailed units are inventive and lifelike, with special pleasure taken from the robotic bipedal assault mechs that move with dazzling hydraulic effect. Hovercrafts slide like bumper cars on skirts of pressurized air, and recon bikes zip across exquisite battlefield terrain scattered with the skeletons of native dinosaurs that add even more unpredictability to the battle.

The player chooses his force from among humans, grotesque Scorps, the dwarven Darken, or Mercs. Each race has its own array of infantry, hovercraft, bipedals, and heavy assault mechs. Your job is to construct and defend a colony/base and provide it with a secure infrastructure, building such elements as armories, refineries, and power plants, and then ringing them with support structures such as autocannon towers and energy beacons.

Dominion's four races each field a unique army of troops and vehicles.

You can do battle in single-player scenarios or campaign play, with a scenario editor for designing your own squabbles. There are also numerous multiplayer options, including DirectPlay support by IPX network, modem, or serial link. Add to this an energetic soundtrack and some of the best cinematics of the year so far, and you've got the makings of a potential C&C-killer.

—*Daniel Morris*

DOMINION

PUBLISHER:	7th Level 800-884-8863 www.7thlevel.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95
AVAILABLE:	May 1997

L.A.U.N.C.H D.A.T.E

Fallout

Steve Jackson Games' GURPS (Generic Universal Role-Playing System) has been one of the most popular table-top role-playing games for years. GURPS has explored all manner of time periods over the years—from high fantasy through gangster to post-nuclear—in the 110 world-books that have seen the light of day. Despite this flexibility, Interplay, which picked up the license, has gone only for a post-nuclear setting in Fallout—a genre handled well by the core GURPS rules to which the programmers are adhering.

GURPS moves from table top to PC in an innovative RPG

Your character will be customizable using the traditional table-top GURPS rules, meaning that he or she develops a core set of statistics and is rounded out by skill selections. Combat, maneuvering, and a whole host of other skills allow the unique character development that is the hallmark of classic table-top role playing.

In Fallout, the nuclear war that caused the devastation has left the survivors in a '50s-style time period. It looks ridiculous and oppressing at the same time. The graphic style is a detailed SVGA isometric view in which your character makes a quest to the surface—a surface inhabited by all manner of weirdos and mutants—in search of the water that will allow those living below the surface to survive.

An intuitive action-cursor interface will make navigation of the looking, speaking, and action commands easy to pull off. Flexibility in the environment is key to making Fallout feel like it belongs in the GURPS universe of products. The design team—all fans of the system—promise to remain as close to the table top as is possible with a computer game.

Post-nuclear nightmares drive the artistic design of Fallout.

Hundreds of characters will roam 15 large, exploration-ready locations. While character interaction is great on occasion, you'll find that discovering the internal make-up of various mutants by splattering them on the walls with heavy artillery is also pretty good fun. *—Rob Smith*

FALLOUT

PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775 www.interplay.com/gurps
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	Second quarter 1997

Advertisement

Designed for Microsoft Windows'95

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

What you get to do: Shoot with gun, shoot with D-pad, shoot with D-pad and partner, shoot with gun and partner,

©1997 SegaSoft Inc. All rights reserved. SegaSoft and the SegaSoft logo are trademarks of SegaSoft Inc. Sega is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Sega Saturn is a trademark of Sega. Scud: The Disposable Assassin, the character

Mageslayer

Action meets high fantasy

Every once in a while, I hear about a game that truly excites me. The latest is Mageslayer, due from GT Interactive this summer. Why am I so giddy? Just look at the screen shot. Does it remind you of something—like the phrase "Green elf is about to die" (recited in a slow, deep voice)? I'm talking about Gauntlet, a four-player arcade classic that sucked more cash out of me than I care to admit.

Mashing monsters, Gauntlet-style.

Mageslayer isn't billed as a reworking of Gauntlet, but from the background and the look, I sure hope it is. Storywise, it involves a detailed history of a fantasy age dominated by a meteorite shower, known as the Starfall, that left radioactive rocks strewn about. These rocks evidently held deep power, so Mages, Mageslayers, and the LoreThanes all sought to exploit them. Over hundreds of years, they achieved various degrees of success. The upshot was the creation of Artifacts, and eventually, the powerful Relics that wielded tremendous powers.

This society was rather unstable, and the Mageslayers ended up dominating. Now they're worried that Wyark, a decidedly evil Undead LoreThane, is on the loose once more, and the Archivists who track such matters have decided that the recovery of five "lost" Relics may tip the balance to defeat this guy. Enter you, stage central.

While the details are still sketchy, Mageslayer should offer 30 levels of action-packed slaying as you play the part of hero in one of four different character classes: Warlock, Arch-Demon, Inquisitor, and EarthLord (at least they sound funkier than elf and warrior!). Speed, strength, and health stats will comprise your character's makeup, aided by individual attack types and a host of special abilities. Role-play elements will come through the use of an experience-point system, further developing the character as you reach the final confrontation.

We'll have more details as they emerge, but if this turns into the Gauntlet-esque update that it could, I could really embarrass myself with excitement. *—Rob Smith*

MAGESLAYER

Publisher:	GT Interactive 800-332-4300 www.gtinteractive.com
Platform	Win 95 CD
Available:	Summer 1997

Advertisement

shoot with D-pad and gun, shoot with gun in each hand. What you don't get to do: Recite poetry, pick daisies, hug lovable stuffed animals.

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SNEAK PEEK

NetStorm

By Rob Smith

An Air Ship comes to rescue a besieged Thunder Factory.

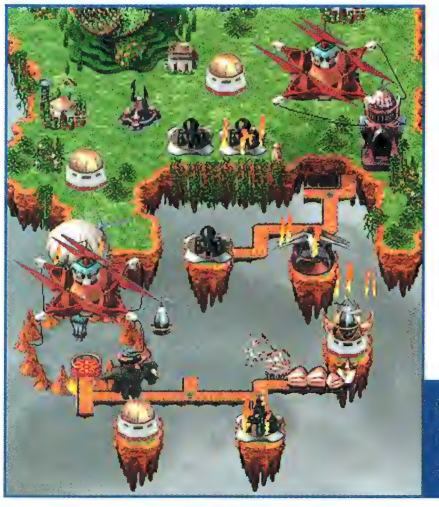
Command & Conquer, plus a host of other real-time strategy games. Chess, Archon, Tetris, Risk and Diplomacy. What do all these different games have in common? They're just a few of those listed by Ken Demarest, president of development house Titanic Entertainment, as influences for NetStorm, the company's forthcoming foray with Activision into the world of Internet gaming. NetStorm draws on classic gaming and adds the flexibility and infinite replayability of human opponents for what promises to be a thoroughly engaging strategy sim.

Plunging headlong into a potential future of games development, Activision's summer release could be just the beginning of this fabled new frontier

Demarest has a fine pedigree as lead programmer on Ultima VII and creator of BioForge at Origin. He was also instrumental in getting the ball rolling on Ultima Online before setting up his own business under the Titanic Entertainment label. The reason for his departure was an early appreciation of the power and potential of Internet gaming.

In the NetStorm universe, three elements dominate: rain, wind, and thunder. Domination of the world involves developing floating islands peppered with an assortment of strategically placed static units, as well as mobile scouting and spying types. Harnessing these three powerful forces of nature in what amounts to the resource-management element, players develop their islands and then throw them into combat with other floating land masses.

More than 20 units are in development, all drawn in great SVGA detail. They range from the resource-storing Solar Collector to cannons, Sun Fences, Windmills, Crystal Crabs, Jacob's Ladder, and Bulwarks. As is typical of real-time strategy games, the carefully constructed combination of these units—damage- absorbing Bulwarks protecting heavy-firing cannons, for instance—is vital to building successful islands. What is not so typical is the removal of micromanagement from the gameplay.



Tetris-style roads supply attack routes.

Units begin acting their role whenever placed, firing at AI-designated targets and removing the need to keep checking on which units are active and which are just taking fire for no reason. This goes a step further in the online environment, as the computer continues running your pieces should the unreliability of the Internet cause you to be disconnected. Instead of being thrown out permanently and having to start from scratch, you can just log on again and re-enter to continue dueling.

Time to move this battle-ready island to the Pyrosphere and prepare for war.

To move and place units across these floating islands, you build bridges to usually empty islands. Fans of Tetris will notice a definite wink in the direction of Alexei Pajitnov's classic as they place the rectangular bridge links. Again, positioning is vital, as it is only at the hubs of these links that units can be located.

On the retail CD, the "War College" will be a series of about 30 missions that teach the different levels of developing NetStorm islands. But the real focus is the online multiplayer game. Activision's server will handle hundreds of players simultaneously; groups of 30 can battle in certain areas, with a limit of eight players in one game.

With certain unit constructions paving the way for spying, treachery, and other devious acts, twitch gamers looking for an action blast will inevitably be found wanting. Players respond to their opponents' moves with chess-like precision in their strategy, giving a definite cerebral bent to the events, but with C&C-style excitement in the real-time environment.

While much of the gameplay is already up and running, NetStorm won't be released until summer. During this time, Activision will be finalizing a pricing structure, since it's still unclear whether there will be an online cost for server access in addition to the purchase price of the retail software. Let's hope not, eh?

NETSTORM

DEVELOPER:	Titanic Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Activision
	800-477-3650
	www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95
AVAILABLE:	Summer 1997

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GAME OF THE MONTH

Flying Corps

By Steve "Richthofen Hunter" Klett

PC GAMES A LIST

I've been itching to fly this WWI sim ever since I first saw it demonstrated at a trade show about a year ago. Even then, the graphics were first-rate, and, unlike previous Rowan sims, Flying Corps looked and felt incredibly realistic. Now that it's finally here, I'm happy to say the game not only lives up to my expectations, it exceeds them in many areas.

I will get you, Red Baron

Flying Corps offers six authentic WWI aircraft for you to fly in eight stand-alone missions and four campaigns. Each one has a unique flight model that accurately re-creates the handling characteristics of its real-life counterpart. These planes represent the backbone of the Allied and Axis air forces: the Spad XIII, Camel, S.E.5a, Nieuport 28, Albatros DIII, and, of course, the Fokker Dr.I Triplane (which no self-respecting WWI flight sim would be without). There are more than a dozen different additional aircraft to encounter in the game as well.

Make Flight Leader and you can customize your plane 32,768 different ways to strike fear into the heart of your enemy.

Without the benefit of firsthand experience, these birds seem to handle much like the big, clumsy, beautiful kites they were: airframes creak and groan with stresses you exert on them, and engines sputter and gasp like overgrown lawnmowers. Even the game's terrain is painstakingly modeled according to archival map data and period aerial photography. Want to buzz the Red Baron's Chateau? You can.

On the highest settings, you get all the realism true simheads love—torque, adverse yaw, slipstream, gyroscopic, and wind effects. You'll have to experiment to see if your chosen kite turns quicker to the left or right, and then compensate for these tail-heavy planes with subtle rudder control. The game parameters are all adjustable to cater to all levels of expertise.

Of the four campaigns, there's one American, one British, and two German. Each attempts to re-create historical periods of the war. In the 1918 Flying Circus campaign, for example, you play the part of the Red Baron's brother, Lothar, as he attempts to best his vacationing sibling's number of kills in a month's time.

The campaigns are compelling and extremely challenging, but they can also be frustrating. For instance, one time I was very close to beating the Red Baron's mark of 52 kills on the campaign's penultimate mission. After shooting down 12 enemy aircraft on one flight—with all the realism settings, mind you—I found that my squadron had scored a total of 19 kills that day with just one loss. A good day, right? Wrong. According to my superiors, that one loss was one too many for the month, and I was sent to a lonely desk job for the duration of the war, with no mention made of my 12 kills. That's just wrong.

Other than that, there's little bad to say about Flying Corps, other than the fact that—despite what the manual says—there's no multiplayer mode. (Empire says it is working on an expansion disc that will provide multiplayer support in Windows 95.) I also ran into a few minor bugs that were easily worked around. Fine documentation, including a replica of a WWI flight manual, and detailed maps of the terrain modeled in the game make up for any niggles.

Like actual WWI pilots, you'll need to navigate by landmarks. But don't worry—maps are included.

Flying Corps certainly stands up there with the best for depth, polish, flexibility, and fun. Right now, at least until the arrival of Sierra's Red Baron II later this year, it's easily the top WWI flight sim. From top to bottom, this is a great game, and a must-have for any flight enthusiast.

FLYING CORPS

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS :	A
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

The definitive WWI flight sim experience.

DEVELOPER:	Rowan Software
PUBLISHER:	Empire Interactive 800-216-9706 www.empire.co.uk
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P166, VESA 2.0–compliant SVGA, 8X CD-ROM drive, Flightstick Pro, rudder pedals
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS ▼ Be careful with some of the tight turns—those wobbly wings might just snap off. ▼ As flight leader, take the time to arrange formations to protect your Green pilots. It'll help you get that next promotion. ▼ Hang on the fringes of mass furballs and pounce on isolated enemy aircraft to safely boost your kills.

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Die Hard Trilogy

By Don St. John

Yippee-ki-yay...

Mindless shooting fun in an office building. Mindless New York City driving-and-shooting fun. Mindless shooting fun at an airport, believe it or not—who'd have thought anything about an airport could be enjoyable?

Looks like you may miss that plane.

You *Die Hard* fans have recognized the "plots" of the series' three movies by now, of course. Well, you'll have no trouble making the mental translation to Fox Interactive's Die Hard Trilogy. This game replicates the basic ideas of the three films in a manner befitting an arcade-type, twitch, blast-anything-that-moves title. In short, it's the perfect end-of-a-bad-day game. No brain required—just sit down and start firing.

This is *Die Hard*, not *Speed*...

If that sounds bad, it's not meant to. Fox is adapting its movie licenses in a deliberately uncomplicated manner. And let's face it: The *Die Hard* movies weren't exactly a philosophical treatise on the meaning of life, now, were they? For the most part, that's the spirit of the games, too.

The three game modules have varying degrees of difficulty. Die Hard, the first one, lands you in a parking garage in L.A.'s Nakatomi Plaza, just like the movie, and your objective is more or less the same—blaze your way through the building wasting scores of baddies and freeing hostages. Although you'll have to be fast on the trigger finger to get through the 20 levels, it's manageable: just pop enemies as soon as you see 'em. It's not *that* simple: you'll need powerups to keep going, and you'll lower your score if you end up reflexively blasting any of the hostages. The Party Ballroom, where you have to dodge snipers, and the ending Rooftop level, where it's helicopters having at you, are particularly tricky. Just keep saving and firing, though, and you'll make it.

The carnage continues in Die Harder, set mainly at Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C. Here, you'll not only have to be fast, but you'll also have to introduce accuracy into the equation by targeting your enemies as you move through the terminals. These guys move a lot better, too—not that it's phenomenal AI, but they will juke and dip on you. Fortunately, you have some bad-ass weapons at your disposal, including an M16 assault rifle, an M60 machine gun, a Steyr-G assault rifle, and grenades. This game is also Twitch City, so be prepared to quickly retarget, switch weapons, and adjust to the somewhat annoying railed auto-movement.

As for the third game, Die Hard with a Vengeance, it could easily be called Die Hardest. You're driving frantically through NYC trying to keep bombs from going off, and it ain't easy. Part of the problem is that, unlike the other two games, it's not intuitive where you have to go next. The other problem is the sheer careening speed of the action. You'll be keying on shouted instructions for turns and actions, with only split-seconds to react. Miss out, and your chance of reaching time checkpoints, better cars, or the bombs themselves goes out the window. Adrenaline junkies will love this, but casual players will have a better time with the other two choices.

Fire at everything, Yankee.

Lookswise, The Die Hard Trilogy is a close cousin of its console version, with exploding polygons the rule. The game benefits from a number of 3D accelerators, but even there, crisp graphics aren't the norm. The developers want to get you in and start you shooting; all other considerations are secondary. If you're looking for uncomplicated action, Die Hard isn't a bad bet; just grab a gun, yell "Yippee-ki-yay!" and start blasting.

DIE HARD TRILOGY

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	C+
UNACCELERATED:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

B OVERALL

It's not brainbending, but it is fun.

DEVELOPER:	Probe Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Fox Interactive 303-369-5324 www.foxinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P120, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P166, joystick or gamepad, mouse, 3D accelerator card
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS ▼ Your choice of controller will make a great deal of difference in how well you play. Die Hard is best played with a keyboard to facilitate movement; Die Harder is absolutely a mouse game; and Vengeance is best on the joystick. ▼ Use the roll move in Die Hard as often as you can; otherwise, the baddies don't have much trouble getting the drop on you. ▼ In Die Harder, Coke adds life. (If you have scruples about obvious product placement, ignore them here.) ▼ A good set of ears is crucial in Vengeance. You'll be getting constant directional instructions, and you won't have much time to execute them. ▼ Switch cars in Vengeance every time you get a chance.

XS

The hype on the street was that XS was going to be a Quake-killer—a single-player solution to deathmatch envy. Not likely. XS is a tease. The computer-rendered introductions, briefing screens, and cut screens are simply beautiful. The level designs aren't bad either. But the computer opponents seem like some ugly CGA nightmare, circa 1987.

The storyline is familiar—bad-ass mercenary types battle it out in a series of sewer-class arenas for a massive cash purse. But once the fight begins, you're faced with hunting blocky, terribly pixelated baddies that look worse than Doom demons up close. And they aren't very good at stalking you as billed, either. At least the AI does know when to duck and run away from grenades and pressed attacks.

Quake-killer DOA

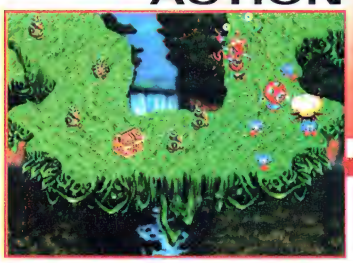
What's worse, XS is sluggish on 133MHz and 200MHz Pentiums. This trait becomes even more pronounced in multiplayer IPX network levels, which can support up to eight players. Stay away.

—George T. Chronis

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive
800-610-4847
www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
STREET PRICE: $50

D+ OVERALL

Mutant Penguins



With a name like Mutant Penguins and a publisher like GameTek, I have to admit, my expectations for this game were lower than for the next Pauly Shore film. But surprisingly, Mutant Penguins manages to combine both originality and playability in a game that may not revolutionize computer gaming, but is a decent way to spend an afternoon.

Using only a quarter-screen, you must guide our odd-looking heroes, Bernard or Rodney, against even more odd-looking aliens, disguised as penguins who are disguised as humans. (Don't ask.) You'll quickly scurry about the 30 creatively designed levels, collecting weapons and power-ups and, naturally, way-laying any pernicious penguins intent on destroying you and ruling the world—all within a given time limit.

A word of warning: Despite a nice tutorial, this game is tough. But for those whose tastes lean more toward Lemmings than Quake, Mutant Penguins is the twisted fun you're looking for.

Waddle while you work

—Shane Mooney

PUBLISHER: GameTek
800-426-3835
www.gametek.com
PLATFORM: DOS 5.0/
Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $20

C+ OVERALL

Advertisement

"Shields up...
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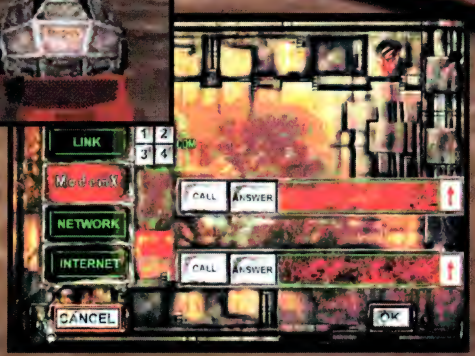

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KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Designed for Windows® 95

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Discworld II: Mortality Bytes...?!

Fill Death's boots

By Rob Smith

Rincewind takes on Death's role, much to the displeasure of faithful mount Binky.

Terry Pratchett is one of the most well-known, well-respected, and downright funny authors working in England. A huge fan base follows the seemingly unceasing and completely bizarre activities that constitute the life and times of his Discworld. Yet, the first Discworld game didn't do great business on this side of the pond. Why's that? Perhaps Pratchett wasn't so well-known here, or more frighteningly, the American market just didn't get the quirky humor.

So let's set the record straight: Terry Pratchett is funny. Officially. Once you accept this as a fact, it's much easier to appreciate and enjoy this second foray into the mind of young apprentice wizard Rincewind.

By way of brief background, the Discworld is a world (a, er, disc...world) that floats in space on the back of four giant elephants, which in turn stand on the back of the 10,000-mile-long great turtle A'Tuin. On the Discworld, the city of Ankh-Morpok subtly blends the downright awful with the progressive cutting edge. Within this city at the guild of magicians resides Rincewind, a cowardly and rather dumb wizard. He gets all the bum jobs to do—like finding Death when the world's most prominent public servant disappears after a large explosion levels a chunk of the city. (Of course, Rincewind was there, and, well...). So people are still shuffling off this mortal coil, but they haven't got the scythe-wielder to do the final deed; he needs to be brought back.

Entering the Elven kingdom can only be done disguised as a unicorn. An orangutan may make a good front end.

Monty Python star Eric Idle reprises his role as the voice of Rincewind, backed by the vocal talents of Nigel Planer (Neil in *The Young Ones*) and comedienne Kate Robbins supplying numerous other character voices. On a technical note, enhancements over the first game include 25,000 cels of beautifully hand-drawn animation that make up the scenes. Other touches include the random interchanging of responses when Rincewind attempts to do stuff—no more "That doesn't work."

In typical graphic-adventure format, there are numerous Discworld locations to visit and characters to chat with, argue with, avoid, chase, and inflict serious damage upon. Items are always strewn around the place that end up being incredibly useful in some bizarre situations. Fortunately for Rincewind, he has Luggage following him around, so he can store all these items until he finds a use for them.

A non-linear path to solving the myriad of puzzles is at once refreshing and also potentially infuriating, as the locations—the Unseen University, land of Djelibeybi, and continent of XXXX (you have to be English or Australian to get this gag straight off)—are pretty sizable and take some exploring. Scattered throughout are subtle nods to and blatant rip-offs of numerous well-known movies (one of the locations is Holy Wood). Be it *Beetlejuice*, *The Seven Year Itch*, or *Life of Brian*, the humor is instantly recognizable.

Beer in hand, cork hat on head, laid back—Death takes it easy on XXXX.

This two-CD set makes for a time-consuming adventure (and the first game is also included in the box as a bonus)—80-plus hours would be a good bet. The comedy situations seem neverending, but while I chuckled and even laughed raucously at some of those moments (that thermometer gag—what were they thinking?), the inclination to see Death reinstated and have Rincewind off the hook wasn't completely gripping. However, it was certainly tremendous fun. It pains me to think that I could suggest an adventure game might be too long, but...

DISCWORLD II: MORTALITY BYTES...?!

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-

B OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A Pratchett fan's dream; a graphic-adventure fan's involving, hilarious, *long* exploration.

DEVELOPER:	Perfect Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-435-7794 www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX4/100, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS! ▼ Check out Marilyn's dress for Glitter Dust. The bellows (from the High Energy part of the University) will help when blown from the sewer (check the Fool's Guild). ▼ Think *Alice in Wonderland* for three pieces of wood (Flamingo, Wading Bird, and Hammerhead Shark). ▼ A drunk Rooster (add corn to alcohol) can be caught and sobered with coffee to con the vampire so you can get his teeth.

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PC-CD ROM
WINDOWS® 95
DOS

Obsidian

By Barry Brenesal

And through the door of the futuristic spacecraft's engine room you see...a vintage 1900 zoetrope.

The best graphics adventure since, well...

PC GAMES A LIST

The greatest thing since Myst." Aren't you sick and tired of hearing that by now? It appears that every graphics adventure since Myst has been the biggest, baddest, bestest bit of bytes in the known universe. It's a wonder laundry services haven't closed from overwork, given the number of slacks and jeans that have been ruined by sheer excitement at so much mindboggling software.

That said, Obsidian *is* the best graphics adventure I've seen since Myst. It does something that no Myst successor has done successfully: it combines a detailed, puzzle-based plot with eerie, discontiguous images, and dishes it all up in startling visual detail—the kind of pinpoint clarity that makes actual dreams seem so real afterward.

A Renaissance piazza being constructed in mid-air.

What is Obsidian about? Welcome to the mid-21st century. You play Lilah, an environmental scientist who, along with her partner, Max, has created and launched the Ceres Project. This device is a weather-control satellite that uses nanotechnology (microscopic robots) to find and repair the worst areas of Earth's seriously damaged atmosphere. Everything's going well until, suddenly, Max disappears. The ensuing search draws you into a mysterious monolith, nicknamed "Obsidian," that's grown over the last few days.

Inside are multiple dream universes, each with its own disturbing logic—a Bureau where all walls contain their own specific gravity and a Factory filled with toys that power a world-destroying behemoth are just two examples.

Like Myst (but typically with greater thoroughness), Obsidian juxtaposes past and future technology to create a sense of displaced time. The futuristic, automated Bureau has receptionist booths that feature '50s television sets complete with black-and-white images of lower face halves; they taunt you with meaningless hints. The plane you fly in a later sequence is extremely modern, but the engine is a zoetrope, a turn-of-the-20th-century film viewer that shows a bird in flight. And guess what? The engine is broken.

For the most part, Obsidian's puzzles avoid or disguise the get-items-combine-items-use-results formula that has been standard operating procedure in nearly every graphics adventure since Colossal Cavern's entrance opened up many years ago. Like Myst, part of the fun in Obsidian lies in figuring out exactly *what* the puzzles are. Left-brainers, take note: These puzzles are more insidious than most, since they often require intuitive "leaps" rather than simple logic. There's no large inventory of goodies to gather, so endlessly clicking objects and scenes won't help you give the gift of flame breath to a dormant metal spider.

The game's graphics and sound are top-notch. Obsidian employs smooth-scrolling 360-degree views that look artificial in the early outdoors sequence but come into their own in the later, self-referential, Magritte-like worlds. The non-interactive hand-drawn cinematics actually work here, developing the background or offering useful clues, and they're consistently carried off with flair and wall-breaking imagination.

Enter a door and you may be transported to a new world—one with its own rules and requirements.

Plot, plenty of unconventional puzzles, remarkable environments, excellent graphics...there's a lot of good stuff here. But above all, it's the meticulous attention to every detail that sets Obsidian apart from other graphics adventures. Like a good novel, the seemingly casual choice of words, setting, character, and narration reveals imagination and conceals the ruthless pruning process that keeps all elements aimed at the creator's intent.

Obsidian will haunt your memory long after you solve it—and you won't be able to put it away until you do.

OBSIDIAN

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Forget about real life—crank up this five-disc adventure.

DEVELOPER:	Rocket Science
PUBLISHER:	SegaSoft 888-734-2763 www.segasoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	AWE 32 sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Don't despair in the Bureau environment. Remember, all six sides of the room have a specific weight. The document you need, Standard Damage, isn't on the literal "floor" you entered upon. ▼ Follow the advice of the Rebel. And remember, rebellion can work on many worlds. ▼ Nothing bad can happen to you until the end, and even both possible endings aren't really bad when you think about them. ▼ Remember the location of the anagram machine. You'll need it later in the Bureau universe. Go with the flow. (Double hint there.)

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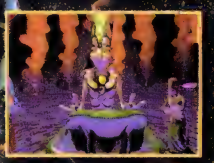

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–Computer Gaming World, US / Four Stars

"War Wind will please real-time strategy gamers to no end."
–Happy Puppy

"War Wind belongs to a holy place set aside for those once-in-a-blue-moon games that utterly redefine what players expect."
–Computer Gaming World, UK / Five Stars

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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Realms of The Haunting

By Peter Olafson

The Soulstone gave him life; only you can give him death.

It doesn't happen often, but every now and then, a computer game takes me back to a sentimental moment from my childhood. It's a nice feeling, and in Realms of the Haunting, it's one of many.

When I was about 14, I spent the summer at a camp in Vermont. The highlight was a long canoe trip that included a turn in Lake Champlain in upstate New York. We stopped on one of its rocky islands for lunch and cliff diving...and such an experience I've never had before or since. The great blue lake was eternally deep, and when I put my face in the water and looked down, I saw no trace of bottom—only a deeper, darker blue.

Detailed environs require careful exploration.

That's the way I responded to this delightful turn on haunted-house adventures: It seems almost perpetual. The bottom's not in sight until you're there.

This first-person action/adventure finds you in control of Adam, a young, Jason Priestley–ish fellow who's summoned by vivid dreams and a mysterious priest to a dilapidated country mansion in Cornwall armed with a lantern and a box of broken seals.

Their purpose? Unknown. You have a long way to go to unfold the Lovecraft-like mysteries of this place. The crumbling house is huge, but initially most of it is sealed off behind magical wards that will slowly give way as you progress through the game's chapters. That's to say nothing of the mausoleum and caverns beneath the house, and the conduits that lead to other places...and other worlds.

They all look OK. The hand-drawn graphics are pleasant in a lightweight, old-fashioned way, and fun little flourishes abound. Meanwhile, key scenes are played out in ominous FMV sequences. Like Azrael's Tear, Realms cleanly integrates shooting and puzzling. You'll use your mouse or keyboard to sharpen a range of weapons on demons and goons, and explore creative uses of your large, well-arranged inventory.

That's where you'll first begin to sound Realms' depths. There's lots of arcane text to pore over, maps and sketches to digest, and objects to examine in 3D and debate with your partner. Oh, yes: A lady psychic arrives once you've made a little progress, and it adds immensely to the game's voice and depth. You'll want to go back and revisit everything you've already seen just to hear Rebecca's take on suits of armor and Adam's appearance in the mirror. The game keeps coughing up interesting distractions.

But for all that detail, ROTH leaves an impression of graphical thinness—a 3D world without weight—and I never quite embraced it as a place the same way I embraced, say, Quake. That, in turn, puts a damper on the mood. The game's rarely riveting. Moreover, the story, while intriguing (until it devolves into the usual good-versus-evil crapshoot), proves rather cumbersome. The designers throw a lot of characters and concepts at the player early on that might have been better spread over the body of the game. And the enemy AI isn't really any AI at all.

Mysteries deeper than the imagination

Nevertheless, Realms is hauntingly good. I'm well into Chapter XI and I still can't see the bottom.

England is full of haunted houses, y'know.

REALMS OF THE HAUNTING

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Lots of deep, dark secrets make it quite compelling.

DEVELOPER:	Gremlin Interactive
PUBLISHER:	Interplay 800-468-3775 www.interplay.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 16MB RAM, VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P75, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$42

TIPS ▼ Light the candles beside the painting of the sarcophagus to open the way to the study. Just make sure you stand to the sides of the hall as you do. (You'll see why.) ▼ You'll need seven serpent statues to get into the sarcophagus in the study. Most are in the study itself, but two are in more obscure spots. Search carefully on your way to Florentine's observatory. ▼ The lion that guards the gate to Raysiel's tower in Raquia can be distracted by the bejeweled meat you'll find in the maze. To lower the pillar on which it's installed, check the nearby bench for a well-hidden button.

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S.P.Q.R.

The grandeur—and the intrigue—that was Rome

By Peter Olafson

S.P.Q.R.: The Empire's Darkest Hour challenges you to stop Rome from burning. But this QuickTime adventure from GT Interactive could use a little fire itself. Based on the popular Web game developed by CyberSites, S.P.Q.R.—a Latin acronym that translates as "the Senate and the people of Rome"—casts you as the central player in a *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* scenario set in the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus.

You're the apprentice to inventor Cornelius, and arrive in Rome from the provinces just as your mentor is arrested by an increasingly panicky imperial administration. Prophecy has foretold of disaster, and Cornelius assigns you to uncover the saboteur (the "Calamitus") inside a year's time and save the empire's hash. The rest is, well, history. (Several histories, actually. Depending on how well you do your job, you'll be treated to one of a number of distinctly different endings.)

Cornelius has left you both means and material for this hunt: a device called the Navitor—which allows you to roam the Forum from within the secure confines of his workshop—and five likely suspects. There's the private investigator, Lucius; Xanthus, a transplanted barbarian; the engineer Gordian; the seer Sibyl; and Verania, leader of the Vestal Virgins.

Glorious settings, sadly devoid of life.

The fundamentals are typical of QuickTime games. You use the mouse to move from handsome static screen to handsome static screen, with the occasional blurry transitional glide in between, while solving puzzles, opening up hidden areas, and collecting clues.

The impressive facade of the forum.

The puzzles are one of S.P.Q.R.'s strengths: They're just enough in touch with antiquity that they don't feel superimposed. The elaborately modeled world looks very smart—especially in 16-bit color—and the Navitor makes an economical front end. The suspects' journals, represented by scrolls lying atop a shelf at screen-bottom, unfurl when something new crops up, and you can click on the name beneath them for reams (and I do mean reams) of text on Roman culture and civilization. Many of the game locations are recorded on a map, and you flash to them with a click, so the trudging about is kept to a minimum. If the game's moving too slowly or quickly for your taste, change the speed.

Overall, you're likely to admire S.P.Q.R. more than you enjoy it. It's distinctly cold to the touch: QuickTime has the effect of dating the game's play style to the early '90s. (Why didn't they use the QuickTime VR that's included with the bonus tour of the Roman forum? Under that engine, you're still moving between static screens, but at each location, you have 360 degrees of freedom.)

Moreover, the balance between game and edutainment is sometimes an uneasy one. I found myself wishing the background material had been better integrated with the core mystery, rather than appearing in stand-alone documents. And I've got a bone to pick with the concept. Where are the people? Unlike the Web game, this Rome is utterly empty, and visiting it isn't like being there so much as exploring a fully restored ruin. It might have been fun to shadow characters, overhear their conversations, see where they went and whom they met. But most of what you learn is presented in print, and, consequently, S.P.Q.R. comes off as rather distant. If this Rome were to burn, who would know?

Use the Navitor to explore from a safe distance.

S.P.Q.R.

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Beautifully presented yet strangely lifeless.

DEVELOPER:	CyberSites
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-621-4847 www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 256-color graphics, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB VLB or PCI video card, Win-compatible sound card
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, Win 95, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS ▼ Always look both left and right when you move to a new position. You never know what will turn up. ▼ One journal is close by your starting location—in a locked cabinet up some stairs and down a hall. To unlock it, you'll need to move the stones on the nearby desk into positions whose attendant numbers reflect the number of sides.

Pod

Looks pretty good, huh?

A taste of MMX things to come

Considering that Pod is riding on a flood of publicity as the premier MMX-optimized game bundled with the first systems using this new graphics Pentium chip, it's hard for expectations not to run high. If you can peel away the hype, there's a lot to like about Pod, but it's not the end-all of racing games.

What's good is that it makes great use of MMX technology. The track environments are well above average, and are visible out into infinity. Special effects such as skid marks and engine exhaust are striking as cars slide into and out of corners. And gameplay is quite nimble on a 166MHz Pentium—as it should be.

All the visual flash aside, Pod does have its share of shortcomings. Steering control with joysticks, steering wheels, and gamepads is oversensitive, with slight alterations throwing the car into walls. The tracks, while gorgeous, are often hard to follow, confused further by plenty of blind turns. Most importantly, Pod really isn't much fun as a single-player game. After a while, the novelty wears off and you want to move on to something else.

Where Pod shines is in multiplayer mode. Getting real people behind the wheel turns this game into a winner, and Ubi Soft is making access to online games easy. Not only does Pod support two players in split-screen on the same computer, but you can also connect eight players in a combination of LAN and Internet access. Ubi Soft has established Pod-Net as a source on the Web to find like-minded racing duelers to put the multiplayer component through its paces.

Although you can only get Pod right now as part of a system bundle, on April 1 a retail version will be released that can run on MMX and non-MMX machines. The more the merrier.

—George T. Chronis

POD

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	A

Don't drive alone.

PUBLISHER:	Ubi Soft 800-824-7638 www.ubisoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P55C/166 (MMX), 16MB RAM, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	steering wheel
STREET PRICE:	$50

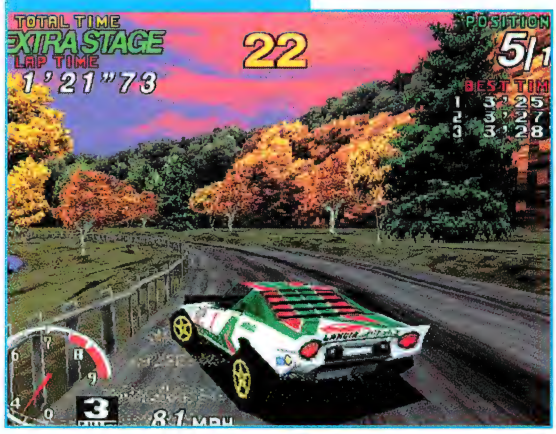
Sega Rally Championship

The game with no interface

I have as much fun as the next guy playing Sega Rally Championship at a coin-op arcade console. So it's not heresy when I say that this fine arcade racer is a disappointing PC game.

Fact: the PC port of Sega Rally Championship ships without an interface. Huh? Whuzzat? You heard me—when Sega ported its coin-op game to CD-ROM, they did it verbatim, meaning that the coin-op interface is still active. Not one single tweak was done to tailor it to the PC.

Gorgeous 3D graphics are the only redeeming factor.



You wouldn't think this would be a problem, but it is. The game is almost impossible to navigate. You can't move around freely from menu to menu, and sometimes you can move around a menu with the keyboard and not your pad or your pad but not your keyboard. And there's a damn countdown clock that gives you nine seconds to make a selection when you don't want to make any selection at all because you're not on the right menu and then it picks for you, and then there's no way to leave your race because you're stuck there just like in a coin-op! I've heard of railed shooters before, but never a railed interface!

Sega Rally Championship does boast some stunning 3D graphics, with accurately reproduced cars and gloriously textured racetracks. But, as in the arcade, there are only two cars and three tracks. The multiplayer mode provides at least some measure of enjoyment from head-to-head racing, but it isn't worth what you'll pay for the package. The sound is dated and the announcer irritating.

This is a perfect example of why some games should cost you sixty bucks and others are bargain-bin fodder. Ignore it unless you desperately need to own this popular arcade racer.

—Daniel Morris

SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

Next time, make sure it's *fully* ported to the PC.

PUBLISHER:	Sega 800-733-7288 www.sega.com/segapc
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P166
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What's on and Where to Go

HYDROFOIL MODE:
Approx. height above ocean surface: 5'5"
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2.75' Blowpipe heavy rockets
2.75' F-90 cluster munitions
35mm GAU-90 4 barrels rotary cannon
A killer submarine.
A deadly hydrofoil.
SUB-SURFACE WEAPONS:
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3" EXT Disruptor sonic torpedo
6" Piranha heavy swarm torpedo
6" Mark-60 Thresher torpedo
6" Mark-65 Moray torpedo
6" Mark-68 Barracuda homing torpedo
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Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

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TIGERSHARK

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GT Interactive Software

Cut the resource blend right before the wars begin.

Enemy Nations

And still they come

PC GAMES A LIST

Command & Conquer is the Doom of the late '90s: It's the single most cloned game in the current computer-game market. Virtually every big publisher has one in the stores or in the works, and many have both. Can you say "saturation"? I thought so.

Happily, there's still something new under the sun, and that's Enemy Nations. You've probably seen the ads. Viacom New Media originally planned to bring this conflation of Sim City and real-time strategy games (industry code for "C&C clones") to market late last year, but in the wake of that publisher's takeover by Virgin, developer Windward Studios has seized the mantle to publish the game on its own.

The premise: Earth is a latecomer to the colonize-the-universe party, and by the time it turns up, all the beer and dip is gone. It has to make do with sharing a single habitable planet with its alien rivals...and sharing and caring are not exactly either side's forte.

Enemy Nations is played out on a beautifully rugged isometric landscape, randomly generated in the interest of replayability. You land your rocket as close as possible to key natural resources—lumber, coal, iron, and oil—and build installations to keep people fed and housed. You'll have to attend to the supply and flow of raw materials. And, at length, you'll have to go to war, C&C-style. Now, imagine it against 19 other players on the Net.

I'm absolutely gaga over the detail: steel frames rising slowly from foundations to create gorgeous buildings, rich smoke coming from stacks, industry-specific sound effects, trucks ambling along the roads, multiple levels of visible damage, fog of war, research, and diplomacy. Better yet, I don't think I've seen it all—not by a long shot.

True, there are some graphical oddities involving roads. And the intro and launch and "mission complete" screens have an amateurish look that a bigger publisher might have changed.

But these are the only concrete complaints I can level at this utterly professional and endlessly entertaining real-time strategy game. Virgin/Viacom should be kicking itself over letting this one go, and Windward ought to pat itself on the back for persevering. Thanks for a lovely time.

—Peter Olafson

ENEMY NATIONS

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	A
MULTIPLAYER:	A

Much more than just another clone.

PUBLISHER:	Windward Studios 800-927-5611 www.windward.net
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, 1MB SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

Krush, Kill 'N' Destroy

Not very original

Krush, Kill 'N' Destroy is typical of the industry's response to C&C. There's nothing particularly wrong with this campaign—pitting post-apocalypse survivors against mutants—but there's nothing particularly novel or striking about it, either. It's got the C&C/Warcraft II mechanics; the puzzle-game scenario design; the booming explosions; and the darkness at the edge of camp.

Oh, they've tried to be different, starting with the goofy title. Click on a unit to issue a command and it may come back with a De Niro–esque, "You talkin' to me?" But the humor—including flowery acting and a wealth of silly text in the FMV mission briefings—isn't much more than a distraction.

On the other hand, you'll appreciate some of the tweaks: veteran units to take with you between missions and the ability to build up to nine of a particular type of unit (or just build them ad infinitum). A whip-crack AI has enemy units making better coordinated assaults, running away when losing, and laying the odd ambush.

Multiplayer support wasn't fully implemented in our review release, but it will be included. Tied to a more original approach, this game could have been a contender. Instead, it's just a pretender.

—Peter Olafson

The survivors hit the surface to strafe their mutant enemies.

KKND

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	Not Rated

Some useful tweaks, but few real additions to the genre.

DEVELOPER:	Beam Software
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts 800-245-4525 www.ea.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 1MB SVGA PCI graphics card, 4X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$60

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— *Computer Life* 1/97

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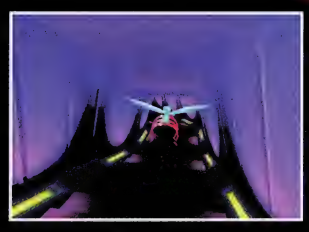
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GRAVITY

Star General

By Daniel Morris

Resource management comes into play as you purchase new units at starbases.

SSI pretty much wrote the book on turn-based wargames with Panzer General and Allied General. Then along came Fantasy General, and that was pretty much the final say in turn-based fantasy battle. Now, SSI turns its sights to the skies and sends its time-honored Five-Star General series into space.

Star General is a splashy, showy redressing of a rock-solid game engine yet to be topped by any

SSI takes to the stars...

turn-based wargame. A few resource-management and diplomatic angles have been added, but the gameplay is no revolution beyond what the game's predecessors have accomplished.

Those seeking a wildly creative gaming experience may be a little disappointed with what they find. It's not that Star General is any less fun to play than its forebears. There's just not much here that seems new, despite the bold palette of spacey colors and the garish design of alien spacecraft.

Star General is two games in one. On the one hand, it's a "naval" combat simulator pitting starfleets against one another for control of systems. The other half of the coin is the ground warfare between land forces on the planets, because even if you can destroy a defending starfleet, you're only halfway to a total conquest.

Not surprisingly, the ground warfare is by far the more interesting and addictive of the two. You command armored fighting vehicles that hover on antigrav skirts; powered infantry in survival suits; and airpower (so-called "skimmers") such as torpedo bombers and fighters. Artillery trade thunderous plasma punches with each other, and city-dwelling militia units wreak havoc on invaders who wander too close. All these battles rage for control of cities, mines, factories, military complexes, and tech centers.

By contrast, the space combat seems forced and contrived because combat operates in the same manner, as though the starships were advancing and maneuvering on a flat battleground. There's none of the three-dimensionality and open-endedness that a space-combat game like Star Control 3 managed to capture so well.

Armor, artillery, and space marines mix it up on the surface to stake their claim on individual worlds.

Six alien races vie for domination of a galaxy whose parameters you specify (smaller if you want to hop right into war, larger if you'd rather cultivate a strong empire before mixing it up). Humanity, represented by the Fleet (heroes of the series of novels on which Star General's backstory is based), faces threats from such rivals as the feline Hressa, the deceitful Cephians, and the insectlike Xritra. Diplomacy is possible, but is limited largely to the offering, acceptance, or rejection of treaties. Key alliances can swing the tide of war for or against you, but only if your allies can be trusted. This makes for interesting turns of events between human players going at it over a network.

The sprites are sure spiffy. SSI had a field day creating the art, and each race has a very distinctive and eye-catching "design philosophy" that makes for visually exciting battles. The Xritra, for example, have hulking, hivelike ships that appear organic, while the feral Hressa strip their ships down to bare bolts and tons of guns. The austere Fleet looks positively knightlike next to the ships of the backward Dragonians, which are crafted from hollowed asteroids. The ground forces look just as diverse and intriguing.

Star General isn't the mold-busting achievement I was hoping for (for that, we may have to wait for Panzer General II and Pacific General), but it's a perfectly good game with a clever visual style. It could have benefited from concentrated design work intended to make it a more innovative experience than the games it follows. As it stands, it's merely the next cool title in the Five-Star series. If you rank them among your all-time favorites, as I do, then Star General is well worth the money.

Impressive fleets of starships converge for interplanetary battles.

STAR GENERAL

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	**B**
MULTIPLAYER:	B-

Entertaining, if fairly predictable, projection of this series into space.

PUBLISHER:	Strategic Simulations Inc. 800-601-7529 www.stargeneral.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 6.0, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90
STREET PRICE:	$59.99

TIPS

▼ Your first two structures built on any new world should be a BioDome and a military complex. Once you have these up and running, expand into tech centers or space docks. ▼ The Dragonians are simple minds. They attack in formations with the heaviest armored ships at the front. Hit them in the rear and flanks. ▼ Take advantage of the Hressan tendency to seek valor over discretion. Lure their elite units out of cities with a challenge of your own elite units, then send in reserves to capture the abandoned city while the Hressans are tied up. ▼ Cruisers are the best investment for a fledgling navy. They offer the best balance of firepower, mobility, and armor for the right price.

Fallen Haven

By Barry Brenesal

The militia units are well-documented in print and in the computerized encyclopedia. It's a shame the buildings aren't.

Taurans and humans battle it out in Fallen Haven and drag plenty of unfortunate neutrals into the mire. Pity these victims of circumstance, but don't let that stop your efforts to conquer them. The enemy is doing the same—turning the might of captured production lines against you, and forging an army that grows by the day.

War without rules

In some respects, Fallen Haven resembles Interplay's M.A.X. Both games allow you to construct a variety of structures over time that develop power, research, mining resources, production capabilities, and military might. But the similarities stop there. M.A.X.'s wars are fought on barren planets between automated units. Fallen Haven contains detailed colonies complete with roads and defensive walls—and powerful swiveling laser turrets, in case you want to get real close and blast away.

Unfriendly visitors arrive—it's time for target practice.

These two major activities, building your own colonies and attacking your neighbors, constitute a turn in Fallen Haven. You can play as either side. (Broadly speaking, Taurans have more powerful units and armor, humans have faster units and longer weapons ranges.) The computer plays the role of your main opponent while handling the neutrals who gallantly resist as you invade their territories.

Designing properly balanced colonies is essential. A colony (yours, your opponent's, each neutral) starts with the basics in place, but with bad management, you can sink your sci-fi equivalent of an industrial-age New York, New York to the status of New York Mills, Minnesota in just a few turns. It's vital to supervise mining, research, power, and production capabilities with an eye toward colony growth, military improvement, and technological development.

Eventually, you'll want to launch a dropship and invade a neutral neighbor. Here you'll move into a simplified X-COM–like mode of operation, exploring, uncovering, and destroying enemies. The relative strength and production capabilities of neutrals varies from game to game, adding a welcome touch of uncertainty to the proceedings. You'll also find that some neutrals possess rebels who join your forces.

With all these challenges, it's strange how the biggest obstacle to success isn't the enemy—it's the documentation. Interactive Magic has placed full background (strength, speed, cost, etc.) on military units in the written reference material, but left out everything about the game's many colony buildings.

You might as well be playing War Wind or C&C: Red Alert without basic colony information. The effect is the same: you don't know how or when to build or upgrade, or what the trade-offs are for concentrating your resources on any particular building. You can always play against another human, but that just means two people scrambling around without a clue. Setting the difficulty level to easy doesn't help much, since this affects number of units, rate of technological advance, and attack precision, thus taking the wallop out of the game's diverse challenges.

A basic Fallen Haven.

Fallen Haven does supply a computerized encyclopedia of all this information, much like M.A.X. or MOO II. Unlike these games, though, this info is stored in a separate executable that must be loaded outside the game itself. Interactive Magic assures us you can switch screens between the encyclopedia and Fallen Haven. Sorry, but that prospect doesn't send tingles of anticipation along my spine.

I don't mind playing against good AI and a game packed with strong challenges, but when the enemy forces in a strategy-based sim are joined by a bruiser named Inadequate Documentation, I have to bow out. My time, and yours, are better spent elsewhere than in Fallen Haven.

FALLEN HAVEN

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	D
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C
MULTIPLAYER:	C

A good turn-based strategy game hampered by a lack of important documentation.

DEVELOPER:	Micomeq
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534 www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Recycle older, lower-tech military units to cut maintenance credits. ▼ Don't lose your capital. It's the only site that allows you to build dropships for invasions. ▼ Send your dropship home after launching an attack, unless you want to transport surviving units out of the zone next turn. Dropships can't take much damage. ▼ Radar units let you look into adjacent provinces and aim nuclear missiles with greater precision. ▼ Surviving units gain experience after battle, and will hit more accurately in their next conflict.

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Over the Reich

Protecting bombers is one of your toughest missions.

To get a fair idea of how this game plays, imagine Panzer General with airplanes. Yet, that may be a little generous, since Over the Reich (OTR) lacks the polish of SSI's megahit strategic wargame.

At first glance, OTR may appear cheesy. Its graphics are far from top-of-the-line, its voice-overs lack authenticity—in short, the game was obviously produced on a shoestring. However, it's also obvious that OTR was made with much care and passion for the era it re-creates; when you give it some time, that makes up for its lack of smoke and mirrors.

Bandits! Six o'clock!

The game lets you command a fighter squadron over Europe in WWII, flying for the world power of your choice: the U.S. Army Air Force, the Royal Air Force, or the German Luftwaffe. Each of your pilots and planes has unique characteristics, and your effective use of their strengths and knowledge of their weaknesses can turn the tide of battle. Pilots gain experience with each mission, and you'll find yourself growing attached to them as the game progresses; losing an experienced pilot deep into a campaign is something you'll try to avoid at all costs.

Gameplay is turn-based. Click on a fighter, then click on where you want it to go or to attack. You can adjust the throttle setting, amount of roll, and whether you want the pilot to dive or climb. Missions range from bomber escorts to ground attacks to fighter sweeps, and they are all challenging: this computer opponent is *tough*! (You can choose to dumb him down if you wish.) If you know some friends' IP addresses, you can play a game over the Internet. If not, well, you can play two at a computer, but there's no modem support or LAN.

In a nutshell, if you're a WWII aerial-warfare buff and a strategy-game fanatic, you must try this game. It doesn't look like much when you start off, but trust me, it grows on you. —*Steve Klett*

OVER THE REICH

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	C-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	C-

This is one addictive wargame.

DEVELOPER:	Big Time Software
PUBLISHER:	Avalon Hill 800-999-3222 www.avalonhill.com
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486, 8MB RAM, SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, upgrade patch to version 1.01 (available at press time at www.bigtimesoftware.com)
STREET PRICE:	$50

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon

The funnier a game advertises itself to be, the less I tend to laugh. That's why it was such a refreshing surprise to load up Callahan's Crosstime Saloon, the brainchild of designer/comic Josh Mandel, and find myself laughing heartily at some of the most humorous and inventive gameplay I've seen in a while. And on top of its welcome humor, it's a fairly engaging adventure in the bargain.

Where everybody—even the aliens—knows your name

There's a bar out on Long Island where the galaxy's downtrodden—aliens, vampires, and regular old folks like us—gather to drink away their cares in the company of friends. But when the gods decide to cut funding for the universe, the patrons realize their only hope is to prove that it really does have an "infinite redeeming value."

Off you go on five quests that will take you across time, across space, from alien satellites to Transylvanian castles, all in an effort to lend a helping hand to barmates in trouble. One hilarious mission sends you off to South America to prevent an evil pencil company from eradicating a rare chocolate tree. Here you have to survive a side-splitting airplane ride with a "freelance" pilot named Guzman whose idea of emergency instructions is to recommend not sitting by the (unhinged) door.

The game world is taken from the Hugo- and Nebula-winning novels of Spider Robinson, whose Crosstime Saloon books enjoy an extensive online following and even a sourcebook for the GURPS role-playing system.

Anyone's welcome to drown their sorrows at Mike Callahan's pub.

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon is a subtle and charming adventure game that almost demands replay to pick up all the tidbits you didn't appreciate the first time around (including a few clever touches in the opening cinematic that escape you until later). This is a watering hole I'll be revisiting for a while to come. —*Daniel Morris*

CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

The funniest bar in the galaxy.

DEVELOPER:	Legend Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Take 2 Interactive Software 800-658-8891 www.legendent.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/33, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, Sound Blaster–compatible sound card
STREET PRICE:	$40

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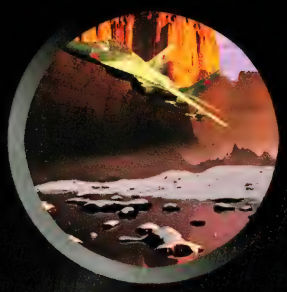

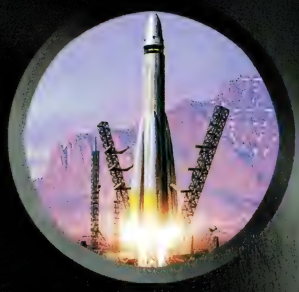

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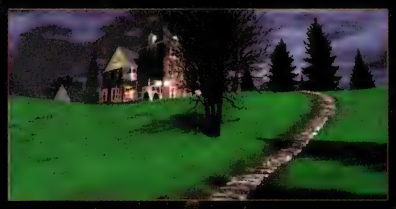

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Huygen's Disclosure

Huygen's passes too much gas for its own good.

Microforum has made a game about a maverick space grunt trying to save the Earth by participating in alien politics, all the while blasting away at aliens. Sounds engaging, but it greatly disappoints.

Huygen's Disclosure presents a King's Quest-style adventure game in which your main goal is to obtain Rachellium, a gas the Earth desperately needs for its population to survive. To get the gas, you must play space politics with two alien cities as they wage a bitter war.

It's hard to begin describing the problems associated with this game. Wrestling with the clumsy controls is sheer frustration, and will leave you walking

Close Encounters of the Thud Kind

in circles or the wrong direction at first. Likewise, the commands used to talk, think, look, and bring up inventory are represented by keys you have to punch, rather than being displayed on the screen. That means plenty of key-crunching for a set of actions, then hitting Esc if you wish to move again. Yikes.

Having to blow aliens away is a pain rather than a pleasure. Because your ability to aim is so poor, you'll be lucky if you can kill your enemies before they kill you. Needless to say, they don't suffer the same shooting problems as you do.

Puzzles and creative challenges are interspersed throughout the game in an attempt to keep things interesting. Yet, when the first puzzle popped up, I didn't even recognize it was a puzzle. It took several minutes for me to realize that there was something I had to solve.

Weak graphics don't help much, and neither does the decision/comment menu that pops up when decision-making is required. The menus offer you a list of actions you can proceed with, as well as comments and questions you can pose to the aliens. These menus are crude and cheapen the look of the game.

Overall, Huygen's Disclosure is wasted potential. Gameplay is slow and unexhilarating. Hoping that something interesting would happen, I didn't shut off the game immediately, but by the end, I felt cheated out of a possibly intriguing adventure.

—Christine Lam

HUYGEN'S DISCLOSURE

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	D

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

This space adventure leads straight into a black hole.

PUBLISHER:	Microforum 800-685-3863 www.microforum.com
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA, sound card, VESA or PCI video, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P100
STREET PRICE:	$40

Scorcher

Great-looking tracks test your patience, not your riding skills.

With the release of Scorcher, Scavenger has managed to prove one indisputable fact of game creation: Graphics don't mean diddly if the game powering them is poorly designed. As I write this, my 1997 Top Five Worst of the Year list already has a contender. In a nutshell, Scorcher is a great game done very, very badly.

This is a hoverbike racing game which uses a more visually arresting version of Amok's dark, moody graphics engine to create six wild, twisting, turning, sometimes-beautiful racetracks that swoop up and down and side-to-side. They should have been a complete, visceral blast to race on.

Sadistic arcade racing

But instead, gameplay is an exercise in frustration. The races all constrain you to an obnoxious time limit, and, idiotically enough, even the practice mode has these limits. Racing against the clock in arcade racers got old a long time ago, and there's certainly no need for it here. To make things worse, the computer opponents have extreme advantages: they start at the beginning of the countdown while you have to sit waiting for the race to begin, and they never seem to screw up (odd, considering the nearly sadistic design of the courses).

For the most part, your bike moves far too loosely, and sliding off the track with only the slightest nudge is the norm. The DOS version, believe it or not, has no joystick support, and in Windows 95, stick support is primitive at best.

Scorcher also suffers from a complete lack of multiplayer options. At least it offers plenty of different graphic-resolution choices (no 3D-accelerator support, though), and the sound and music are decent.

As near as I can tell, this is really just a graphics-engine test demo, and somewhere along the way, someone forgot that and released it as a game.

—Jason D'Aprile

SCORCHER

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	D

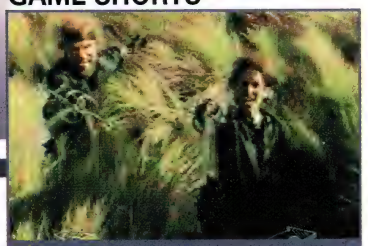
MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A potentially great racer turns out to be a tragic disappointment.

DEVELOPER:	Scavenger
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847 www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$50

A Fork in the Tale

Medieval Men Behaving Badly



Beware of the guards—they won't think twice about introducing you to the butt-ends of their spears.

I can just imagine how the developers of A Fork in the Tale first pitched this new interactive movie/game:

Pitchman (excitedly): It's *Willow* meets *Mystery Science Theater*. You get transported to Eseveron, a parallel universe, after being shot on a routine return-the-video run. You save Earth and maybe get the girl.

Decision man (with doubt): I don't know....Are there any celebrities in it?

Pitchman: Yeah! Rob Schneider, who's—

Decision man: Who?

Pitchman: You know, he was in *Judge Dredd*. (No recognition.) He was on *SNL*. You know, the Richmeister. "Making copies..."

Decision man: Oh, yeah. He was funny.

Pitchman: And we have various comedians writing for us, like the guy who does *Dr. Katz*. (No recognition.) Well, never mind. It's going to be groundbreaking—an interactive movie! We'll make millions!

Decision man: Well...okay.

Well, maybe not, but A Fork in the Tale is very much an interactive movie, since everything is done, for better or worse, in video. The quality of the video varies from OK to complete, unidentifiable mush. The sound fluctuates with inconsistent volume and quality, and in places it disappears altogether.

After a confusing start, Fork's gameplay is surprisingly entertaining. Its saving grace is its fast pace. The game is careful to open up new scenes and dialogue gradually enough to maintain your interest and keep you playing.

Unlike adventure games that stop from frame to frame, you need to act quickly. In fact, if you make no choices at all, the computer will automatically make them—not always to your liking. The game also involves little contests (such as dueling) that involve some hand-eye coordination and speed.

Is it funny? I did laugh at a number of the comments. More importantly, variations in the dialogue ensure that the same old jokes aren't repeated over and over again.

In the final verdict, the game works. It's lighthearted and entertaining, and, like a movie, it moves quickly while taking its time to unfold the story and conflict. Although it wouldn't win even a Golden Globe for screenplay or effects, it may be worth the price of admission.

—Christine Lam

A FORK IN THE TALE

GAMEPLAY: B-
GETTING STARTED: B-
GRAPHICS: C-
SOUND CHECK: D+

C+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Rob Schneider wisecracks his way through this all-video action/adventure.

DEVELOPER: Advance Reality
PUBLISHER: AnyRiver Entertainment 415-742-7932 www.anyriver.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P60, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB video card, Win 95–compatible sound card
RECOMMENDED: P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, 1MB DirectX-compatible video card
STREET PRICE: $46

3DO Games: Decathlon

Here's one that'll take you back. 3DO Games: Decathlon evokes memories of the Epyx sports games that had you wearing out the keyboards of 8-bit and 16-bit machines a decade ago.

Contender for the bronze

This amalgam of 10 track-and-field events pits your athlete against seven other human or computer opponents in the race for the gold.

This game's not just beating on two keys, either. The grueling 1,500-meter run requires a sense of pacing, and the javelin, pole vault, and 110-meter hurdles require more than a two-fingered typist's coordination.

You can customize your detailed 3D character's abilities and appearance, practice any event, and keep records. Oddly enough, however, all the competitors are men.

In the long run, Decathlon comes off as a bunch of events, lacking a proper wrapper to give the proceedings some sense of pomp and circumstance beyond the TV-style event intro screens. As a result, it feels conspicuously unfinished. Persistent technical problems when using any install option other than "minimum"—especially the game's tendency to quit to the Windows 95 desktop—don't help matters.

—Peter Olafson

PUBLISHER: Studio 3DO 800-336-3506 www.3do.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $35

C+ OVERALL

Soul Trap

How's that classic Kinks song go? "Par-a-noi-a, self-de-stroy-aaaaaa"? Tell that to the guy in Soul Trap. As the game's tormented hero, you're a quivering mass of fears and phobias. Determined to face them head-on, you leap into the terrifying world of your imagination.

They're coming to get you, Malcolm

And it's...a three-dimensional platform game? Yup. Soul Trap's 11 expansive levels—an amusement park, a water world, and more—let you leap around floating platforms, while fighting off the usual nasties with daggers, Uzis, and the like. These creatures look better than their fuzzy, polygonal surroundings, but not much.

Soul Trap is a game of skill and quick reflexes, not graphic violence. Many of the levels are set high above the ground, so missing that beam or slipping from that platform means falling to your death. You'll be doing that a lot; even with your controller and perspective of choice, this game's *tough*—and reloading levels is slooooow, even on a P200! But action fans may find it a nice change of pace.

—Corey Cohen

PUBLISHER: Microforum 800-685-3863 www.microforum.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $40

C OVERALL

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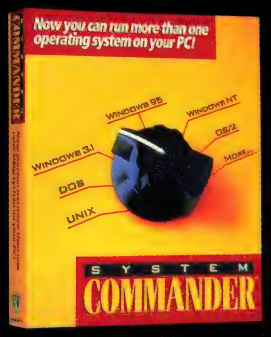

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HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II

Check the rules book for the special advantages of a given unit. For instance, Archmages are missile-ranged units that suffer no attacking penalty for adjacent enemies. They're also very fast, giving you first strike in most battles.

By Barry Brenesal

Several spells are handy for specific hero types. Death Ripple and Death Wave are particularly good for Necromancers, because they kill only living creatures.

Lord Ironfist is dead, and the struggle for the realm promises a long and ruthless civil war. What can you do? Choose a side, of course—and then pay close attention to these hard-earned strategies for the ultimate fantasy battle.

Check out the skills! Expert Wisdom lets you learn 5th-level spells, the highest in the game. Advanced Necromancy makes 20 percent of your opponents killed in battle your fighting skeletons. Expert Mysticism gives your hero the maximum magic points on the road. And that's just for starters...

Maps

HMM II's playing field is significantly larger than its predecessor's. On medium, large, and extra-large maps, it's imperative that you send out a scouting hero and survey the landscape as soon as possible—even if you can't supply him with any troops. Have him pick up resources, claim mines, investigate strange buildings, and locate neutral towns for you.

Convert captured neutral towns into castles as soon as possible. Towns add 250 gold pieces to your daily income; that's upped to 1,000 pieces with a castle. Castles also support the development of all appropriate armies and other useful buildings, while towns support only the lowest creature armies.

Always check the stats on this week's heroes-for-hire. You never know when someone good may turn up.

Don't bother investing in captains of the guard. They're usually pretty weak, and if your castle is captured, you'll end up facing your own soldier as a foe. Instead, invest in a new hero if your castle is about to be attacked. Assuming all your armies are defeated, your hero will vanish, rather than adding to the might of your enemies.

On large and extra-large maps, a spell like Dimension Door becomes an enormous boon. It lets a hero teleport all over the place, provided you have a ready, renewable source of magic points.

Develop a strategy according to the conditions of your scenario. If you're near enough to obelisks to place the location of the hidden artifact with any certainty, send a throwaway hero there to do nothing but dig. If your main goal is to conquer a specific town, scout out that area and build a very powerful force to overwhelm it.

If you observe an enemy hero casting a fantastic spell, locate that enemy's castle. Try to take it over; if you're successful, you'll gain access to that spell and others. If you stumble upon the Fitzbin of Misfortune, transfer it as soon as possible to a throwaway hero, a scouting type with one army who will never enter battle. Or if you're running a Necromancer hero, give it to him. Undead troops never experience positive or negative morale effects.

There are several negative artifacts in HMM II, and the game's rather sneaky about them; somebody might even offer one for sale to your hero. Save before you "run over" an artifact or make a deal for one, since you can't always tell what you're buying.

Hero Types, Their Care And Feeding

The manual tells you that barbarian and knight heroes are poor in the endgame, but don't believe

The attacker has unleashed his vampires on those archers, knowing that missile-firing units lose their advantage when an opposing unit is next to them.

it! Give them castle armies belonging to magic-casting types (sorcerers, necromancers, wizards, and warlocks) and hand them a few spell-enhancing artifacts: they rule in short and medium-length games. Those attack and defense bonuses more than compensate for any lightning bolts, fireballs, and other spells most enemy mages can throw.

Necromancers should be sent after every large group of minor-league monsters in sight, so that your supply of skeletons quickly increases. Neutral peasant armies are particularly attractive: even enormous ones fall before the might of a dozen liches.

Liches (bottom left) can destroy huge numbers of peasants very easily. This is an easy way to gain experience, and if your hero is a Necromancer, some of the slain enemies will arise as Undead to serve you.

Check over every hero that turns up for employment each week! There may be a ringer in the bunch who has well-trained skills. (Most heroes start with virtually no training.)

No hero is as mighty as a barbarian with some spell-enhancing artifacts—unless it's a warlock with several attack/defense-related artifacts. In other words, compensate for the weakness of your hero via artifacts so that you can turn out world-beating armies.

While it's important to grab whatever castles you can, don't neglect opponent armies! Try to leave more than just a couple of enemy troops alive at the end of any given turn when battling your computer opponent's hero. If just a few troops are left the hero may flee, being recruited instantly by your opponent with all experience intact. Worse, your opponent will regain all of the recruited hero's artifacts. Wait for the right moment, and then hit the remnants of the enemy hero's army with everything you've got—all your troops and a destructive magic spell—and kill it off in one turn.

Check your Thieves' Guild late in the game to determine your opponents' strongest armies. You don't want to click on a seemingly weak enemy hero, only to discover upon attacking that your enemies' few armies are powered by incredible spell resources and steroid-based artifacts.

Skills

Mysticism is possibly the single most valuable skill for magic-casting heroes, since it replenishes spell points on the road. Ballista skill will make your attacks on castle walls more accurate. It's particularly helpful when your heroes are leading armies with no flyers and few missile-casters.

Archery is an extremely useful skill for magic and sword-swinging heroes alike. It increases the effectiveness of all missile-launching troops, whether they use arrows, rocks, or fire blasts.

Luck and Leadership (morale) can have a major, permanent effect during battle. With these skills, you can forget about having to take precious time traveling to locations that will boost them temporarily. Note, though, that Leadership skill is wasted on a Necromancer, since the Undead are impervious to morale changes.

The Wisdom skill lets your heroes learn more powerful spells, so it, too, is very useful to all hero classes.

Building a Castle

At the start of a game, add creature homes, the Well, and the Statue during the first week; money and armies should be your biggest drive. Later, as you acquire more money, grab all the free resources and mines you can, allowing you to build up your Mage Guild and upgrade your army-producing centers.

Look around your first castle for a sawmill and metal mine to claim. The scenario designers generally provide these, because they are essential for further castle development.

Before you upgrade an army-producing building, consider whether the resources involved wouldn't be put to better use elsewhere. Remember, you can always improve all the creatures subsequently produced by that building when you add that upgrade. Just bring the older armies back to that castle, double-click them, and choose "upgrade."

On the other hand, there are some buildings that will magically improve a few basic armies into advanced types—dwarves into battle dwarves, for instance. Better still, these units perform this feat at no charge. Check for these fort-like structures as you survey the land around your castle.

Try to get a monster rated "ultra fast" or "very fast" with every hero. If an enemy hero doesn't have one, you'll always get the initiative at the start of battle. (In ties for speed, the attacker gets the initiative.) Assuming you have some good area spells, this can provide a devastating advantage.

On the Road

Look for desert areas with magic lamps. These contain genies, the best armies you can buy on the road. They provide an enormous advantage if you grab them at the beginning of the game.

The Kingdom Overview Screen lets you monitor cash and resource flow. Use the area at the bottom of the screen to manage your resources.

To find out more about useful spell combinations and how to best structure and use your monster armies, check out the ongoing HMM II strategy guide at **www.pcgames.com.**

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Wheeeeeeeeeeee! Don't you just love the thought of cheating? The Cheats Guy does. You'll find no anti-snipe arguments here: it's all about winning, by any means necessary. And that's exactly what you'll do with this month's crop of codes. First up: some amazing tricks for skipping levels and getting all the weapons in Tomb Raider. (Whoo-hoo! Take that, T-Rex!) We've also got a heap of Wages of War codes, ready to make your mercs ballistic. Finally, when the smoke clears, try these fun-lovin' cheats for FIFA '97; they may not help your game, but you'll love the new players and the chance to abuse your fans. Go for it!

Wages of War

During gameplay:

Making sure you're in Caps mode, hit **Enter**. Now, to activate cheat mode, type **BLOOD MONEY**. This will let you enter the cheat codes below while also allowing you to see enemy movements. (Typing **BLOOD MONEY** again will turn cheat code mode off. Any cheat codes put in will remain in effect, but you will not be able to activate any others until you type **BLOOD MONEY** again.)

ADJECTIVES: Gives all mercs in the squad all weapons, ammo, equipment, and special objects. Also increases all merc's stats to max.

BILL: Gives current merc all weapons, equipment, and special objects.

VERB: Gives current merc one clip of each ammo.

LIBERTY: Gives current merc all weapons and maximum stats.

ELBOW ROOM: Provides 999 action points for the current merc.

DEADMAN: Kills all enemies instantly.

STATS: Gives current merc maximum stats.

MORTAL: Changes the current merc's stats to that of an average-level merc.

NOUN: Gives current merc maximum health.

FILL MAGAZINE: Gives Abdul's magazine two of everything.

SMOKE: Gives current merc 25 smoke grenades.

TIMERS: Gives current merc 10 satchel charges and 10 timers.

911: Gives current merc 10 first-aid kits.

HOUR: Adds one hour to the game time.

MMIN: Adds five minutes to the mission time.

SET MINE: Lays mine at current merc's position.

BANG: Activates all damage links of all objects.

EXPLODE: Activates all destroy links of all objects.

OH DARN: Launches 100 random mortar rounds onto the map.

SEND IN THE CLOWNS: Changes game to a clown motif.

OH BOYS: Restores clowns to normal mercs.

FIFA Soccer '97

To enable the cheats, set your system date to February 29, 1997. Then, select the Singapore team, and while playing the game, type one of the following cheats:

LTH: Makes opponents score on their own goal.

LAOCHIAO: Gives you more special players, including Quah Kim Song and Dollah Kassim.

KELONG: Gives you special players like Abbas Saad and Michael Vana.

KAYU: Puts referee in his underwear.

CANTONA: Lets you give spectator a flying kick.

Tomb Raider

Try these cheats during a game:

(1) While holding down the Shift key, take one step forward, then one step backward.
(2) Release Shift and turn 360 degrees to the right three times (without pausing).
(3) Now, if you jump backward (Alt-↓), you'll get all weapons and full ammo.

To skip to the next level, follow steps (1) and (2) above, then jump forward (Alt-↑) instead of backward.

Note: You may have to try these cheats a few times before you get 'em right. Standing next to a wall or facing a fixed landmark will make it easier to gauge whether or not you've made a full 360-degree turn.

In February's issue, we mistakenly left out the key combo that enables the SkyNET cheats. To use them correctly, hold down Alt and \, and type ARNOLD (all weapons), COUNTERS (shows game counters), ILL BEBACK (skips level), JOYCAM (third-person perspective; only in multiplayer games, and if using a joystick), NITROUS (speeds game), SLUGS (all ammo), SUPERUZI (superuzi), SURGERY (full health), VERSION (version #) or WILLNOTSTOP (invulnerability). Then type Enter.

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your cheat-code requests to:

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Compiled by Corey Cohen

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It's time for the leading online service provider to shape up

By David Gerding

Kludge Alert

America OnHold

To paraphrase Jack Nicholson in *Batman*, America Online needs an en—. Decorum prevents me from quoting the Joker in entirety, but the suggestion involves a rather unpleasant hygienic procedure. I mean, let's face it: America Online has always been more than a bit kludgey, and things have only gone from bad to worse. It's time for the leading online service provider to shape up—and we've got a list of demands.

First, if AOL plans on getting the game crowd on board, it'd better start supporting standard TCP/IP connections. Setting up Mplayer or TEN to run through AOL is, shall we say, *involved*. (I've had more enjoyable dental visits.) If AOL wants to be the online service for everybody, it should start by letting people go where they want, and being as easy to configure as its competition. Right now, it isn't.

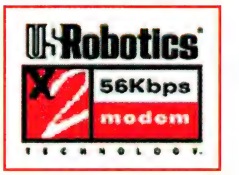
While AOL professes to want the game crowd, we suspect it has some apprehensions about committing to the game market. AOL execs know that gamers, on average, are going to spend more hours online—bad news when you've got unlimited pricing. Worse, games are probably the most demanding applications in terms of creating traffic on the Net, with all those bytes going back and forth for as long as people are playing. Could this be why AOL has yet to roll the Imagination Network into its Games Center lineup—a company for which it's paid perfectly good money? That said, kudos to CEO Steve Case for taking a step in the right direction: AOL has announced that it is pulling $100 million from money earmarked for yet more advertising to beef up its infrastructure. This means more lines, more bandwidth, and the like. We only wish it would *double* the amount. (In an informal test, AOL consistently flunked the latency test at Origin's Ultima Online site.)

Secondly, AOL needs to solve its e-mail inconsistencies once and for all. Attached files from the Internet should decode automatically, as long as they are in UUE, Base64, or some other Net standard. And files sent from AOL to non-AOL addresses should get there *intact*—too often they aren't. Finally, the "universal inbox" for e-mail is a great idea, and one that CompuServe and other services support. What's AOL's excuse?

Hope you're listening, Steve.

Caveat emptor!

Required Gear



Listen up! If you're feeling speed-deprived and are on a budget, you should consider the new 56K modems that are now hitting the market. Why? Because ISDN modems and phone lines are super-expensive and cable modems are stillborn in most of the country. Upgrading to a 56K modem could be the alternative for you today.

While only a short time ago modem engineers were telling everyone that the best speed over ordinary phone lines was 33,600 bits per second, they were, thankfully, wrong. The catch to 56K modems is that they can only squeeze those extra bits into the downstream data—the bits flowing to you from the computer to which you're connected. The data you send upstream still goes at 33.6K. The second catch is that the computer you called has to be designed to deliver 56K downloads. Right now, there are two competing standards: U.S. Robotics' X2 and Rockwell's 56K Plus.

For my purposes, I chose the U.S. Robotics Sportster 33.6 Voice based on X2. Why? Even though Rockwell makes the chips in 75 percent of the world's modems, U.S. Robotics appears to have gotten a head start in signing up X2 supporters on the server side. The company's enlisted America Online, CompuServe, and over a hundred major Internet service providers so far. Whither AOL goes, the rest should follow. Also, USR has always made excellent modems, and would likely make another upgrade available should a new "common" standard emerge from the ashes of an X2-versus-56K battle. Until a standard does emerge, chances are you'll be able to download patches and demos at twice the speed with X2 if you're using a major online provider.

Upgrading my modem involved swapping out the old modem ROM with a new chip from USR. Boom! 56K downloads. USR promises these upgrade chips will be available for a nominal fee. If you've purchased a more expensive "Courier" series model, these modems can accept flash ROM software upgrades.

The Sportster Voice also supports fax and voice mail, so you can annoy your friends with a voice-mail box system, and caller ID and distinctive ring so you can avoid them once you've annoyed 'em. Recognizing that sometimes you need to configure hardware the old-fashioned way, the Sportster has the ability to use Plug and Play optionally as well. If you're shopping for a new modem, you can't go wrong with the Sportster 28.8, er, 33.6, uh, 56 Voice.

Quake Mods

The ever-burgeoning world of Quake has thrown up plenty of variations to let you get even more out of the game. Here's a couple of options, with instructions for getting them up and running.

Defending and capturing flags is great multiplayer fun.

Reaper Bots

Beaten all the levels in Quake? Wanna Deathmatch your friends but don't have enough computers? Wanna Deathmatch but don't have any friends? Use the Reaper Bots. Steven Polge's nifty mod allows Quake to be played with "bots"—computer-controlled Deathmatch opponents who can play with an almost-human AI. If you need practice against challenging, circle-strafing opponents, set the skill level to 3 and see if you can keep up. The file can be found at **www.pcgames.com** as well as other Quake sites.

How to Install the Modification

1. Create a sub-directory called RPBOT in your Quake directory. For example: C:\Quake>md rpbot
2. Copy the archive into the RPBOT directory.
3. Extract the archive in the RPBOT directory.
4. To play, type QUAKE -GAME RPBOT from the Quake directory. This modification only works with the registered version of Quake.
5. Make sure you run multiplayer (death match)—the bots don't play co-op. To change skill levels, type SKILL x at the console, where "x" is a value between 0 and 3 (inclusive).

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The modifications included in this archive are Copyright 1996, Steven Polge. The original QuakeC source is Copyright 1996, id software.

Authors may not use these modifications as a basis for other publicly or commercially available work.

Capture-the-Flag (CTF Quake)

Organized chaos and mayhem are the order of the day. After the rush of manic deathmatches, CTF adds a more strategic element to the gibfests. It's growing in popularity all the time, so check out the patch (available at **www.pcgames.com** and elsewhere). Created by Dave "Zoid" Kirsch, this file can be installed on a Quake server (as it already is in many instances) and then run in the following manner:

How to Install the Modification

1. Create a sub-directory called CTF in your Quake directory. For example: C:\Quake>md ctf
2. Copy the archive into the CTF directory.
3. Extract the archive in the CTF directory.
4. To connect over the Internet to the Custom ThreeWave Servers to play CTF, first connect to your ISP in Windows 95.
5. Start CTF Quake by typing Q95 -GAME CTF in your Quake directory in the MS-DOS Prompt. (Note: Do NOT quit Win 95; use the MS-DOS Prompt shortcut.)
6. Connect to a server running ThreeWave CTF in Custom mode. You can find a list of them at **http://quake.threewave.com/capture.shtml.**

If you get an error about a model or map not being found, the pack was installed incorrectly. Try going through the procedure again.

Note: To use the grappling hook, switch to the axe by pushing 1, then push 1 again. Use fire to shoot the hook. Hold down fire to "reel in" and be pulled up. You can switch weapons and still be hooked on a wall or ceiling. For example, hook yourself up to the ceiling and switch to the rocket launcher, then wait for unsuspecting passers-by. This makes for some interesting sniping opportunities, though, of course, we discourage that sort of thing. ("Come out and fight like a man!")

Copyright and Distribution Permission

The beta release can not be used in any form but for playing on quake2.threewave.com. This is not a full release. You may not extract the levels from this release and use them on your servers. Please wait for the full release, as this is a test—bugs are being ironed out with these levels.

Disclaimer: Dave "Zoid" Kirsch is not responsible for any harm or psychological effects, loss of sleep, fatigue, or general irresponsibility from playing this patch.

KEY	WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES
[	IMPULSE 200: Increment skin (if skins support is set).
]	IMPULSE 201: Decrement skin (if skins support is set).
p	IMPULSE 202: Toggle skins support–three settings (off, normal, skill skins). With skill skins mode, bot skin depends on its skill level.
b	IMPULSE 205: Add a bot (can do it repeatedly).
n	IMPULSE 208: Add four bots.
o	IMPULSE 212: Toggle limited observer mode (you are invisible to bots unless you attack them, but move normally).
v	IMPULSE 215: Toggle verbose mode (bots tell you what they're doing).
m	IMPULSE 220: Normal scores (frag count).
q	IMPULSE 222: Show top three scores.

For more info, refer to the author's REAPRB80.TXT file in the RPBOT directory.

This Year's WingMan And Other New Sticks

Considering more than 50,000 WingMan Warriors were sold by the end of last year, the arrival of Logitech's all-digital WingMan Extreme will be big news to a lot of gamers. But massive sales doesn't mean anything if a joystick or gamepad doesn't fit the way you play. That's important when you're considering whether to retire your existing unit to buy any of the new designs crowding the market this spring.

Even today, it's still nearly impossible to find a controller that combines just the right control feel and accessory-button utility to make it the perfect choice. But the major players in joystick and gamepad design continue working hard to create the one "great" design, so *PC Games* had a look at the latest models from Logitech, Interact, and CH Products to see how they shape up.

It costs a bundle, but the F-16's worth it.

WingMan Extreme

RATING: C+

The WingMan Extreme is one of those middle-of-the-road sticks that are appearing more and more frequently these days—a little too much stick for a garden-variety gamer but not enough for anyone looking for a full sim experience.

Priced higher than other digital joysticks such as the Microsoft SideWinder and the Gravis Firehawk, the WingMan Extreme offers a solid steel-weight base and a nicely sculpted handle with a palmrest that allows for hours of comfortable play in one sitting. Overall, the range of movement feels solid, and the stick exhibits enough resistance for smooth in-flight maneuvering.

The WingMan Extreme may not be the best stick in your price range.

It installed in a flash in Windows 95, and I encountered no configuration hang-ups from the Windows or DOS platforms. Yet, surprisingly, there's little to warrant the additional 15 bucks it will cost you. Despite the fact that it's a great stick with an all-digital design, at $50-plus, it offers nothing special to justify the outlay over cheaper sticks with similar features. (Logitech; 800-231-7717; www.logitech.com) *—Daniel Morris*

F-16 Fighterstick

RATING: B+

The F-16 Fighterstick is CH Products' long-awaited king-of-the-hill joystick for flight-sim aficionados. The third member of the company's new line of F-16 sticks, the Fighterstick boasts one 8-way hat switch, three 4-way hat switches, three push buttons, and a trigger. It also has trim controls and a rotary throttle. Used by itself, the Fighterstick offers 16 fully programmable functions—20 when used with the Pro Throttle.

That's a lot of programming to be done, though true flight-sim-heads will dig the payoff. Now they can assign virtually every vital function to a button press: chaff, flares, radar controls, ejection, etc. Programming is a breeze as well, with the supplied mouse-driven interface. Basically, you press the joystick button you want to program, and then the keyboard key (or keys) you want that button to emulate. It's that simple.

The Fighterstick has the same durable construction as its Flightstick Pro forefather. Drop it, slam it, throw it (not recommended at home, of course)—this is one stick that can take it. So what's the catch? All this comes at a hefty suggested retail price of $189.95, but you can probably find the F-16 for just over $100 on the street. (CH Products; 619-598-2518; www.chproducts.com) *—Steve Klett*

Magnum 6

RATING: C+

This new six-button joystick from Interact is a perfect example of the contradictions in input peripherals. In two areas, the Magnum 6 is superior. The grip is perfect for an adult hand—it's comfortable and attractive. More importantly, the movement action of the joystick is high-effort and smooth. In a test with Jetfighter III and A-10 Cuba!, completing perfect rolls was effortless. Likewise, control execution (lining up and holding targets)

Great feel is the Magnum 6's highlight.

with MechWarrior 2 was much more satisfying than with many other sticks I've tested.

That said, the rest of the Magnum 6 can't be so highly recommended. Buttons two and three are placed right next to each other, often resulting in your pressing the wrong button during critical moments. The Magnum 6 also lacks a weighted base, necessitating an extra hand to hold it steady—not a good idea when your flight sim forces you to work buttons on the keyboard during a dogfight. If you're left-handed, the placement of accessory buttons and the throttle in the lower left is a hassle. The throttle button seems to be an afterthought and feels awkward, especially in battle.

Bottom line? The $30 street price will be attractive. If you're mostly a Flight Simulator type of pilot, the Magnum 6 will be perfect for you. But think twice before using it to attack P47 Thunderbolts on patrol. (Interact Multimedia; 410-785-5661; www.interact-acc.com)

—George T. Chronis

3D Program Pad

RATING: C

It's obvious that the analog joystick on the Nintendo 64 controller is sparking a trend in PC gamepads. Interact's 3D Program Pad is a good attempt to combine traditional pad design with the extra features seen on twin-boom designs. However, the results are mixed.

Unlike the N64's pad, the Program Pad's mini-stick lacks supple feel and action. Although the button placements seems less crowded than you'd expect on a general gamepad footprint, the Program Pad doesn't feel quite right in adult hands. Pre-teens may be OK with it, but for everyone else, the slightly wider and larger left-hand side of the pad, combined with the smaller righthand side, lacks the curved edges and sculpted holds for long hours of comfortable gameplay.

In less-intensive side-scrollers or racing games, the 3D Program Pad provides acceptable control, but it starts becoming burdensome in fighting games. On the whole, it's not useful enough to warrant the $40 street price. There are more capable gamepads from the likes of Microsoft and Advanced Gravis. (Interact Multimedia; 410-785-5661; www.interact-acc.com)—*George T. Chronis*

Logitech ThunderPad

RATING: B-

Nothing fancy here—your basic eight buttons and a D-pad, held in place by a light, thin, sleek case. At $30, the Logitech ThunderPad is being aggressively priced to compete with some of the big names in gamepads, and dollar-for-dollar, it's not a bad one.

The ease with which it installs in Win 95 and the simplicity of its game-customization software are delightful. Within five minutes, I had the ThunderPad installed on my machine and configured for NCAA Championship Basketball and Mortal Kombat 3.

I also like its compactness and lightness. It may not have the PlayStation-style pontoon arms seen on many of the popular new gamepads, but the ThunderPad's still a nice-fitting pad that remains comfortable after long periods of play.

Unfortunately, there's a big strike against it: It's not daisy-chainable a la the Microsoft SideWinder or the Gravis Gamepad Pro, the latter of which even includes a Y-cable for daisy-chaining. The absence of this feature puts a crimp on fighting-game fans and sports junkies who appreciate simultaneous gamepad play on a single machine. (Logitech; 800-231-7717; www.logitech.com)

—Daniel Morris

The ThunderPad is easy to customize in Windows 95.

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MMX whats and sound whys

By Patrick Marshall

MMXecution

Q I keep hearing about Intel's new MMX technology that will be implemented into the Pentium chip. What exactly does MMX do, and will current Pentium owners be able to upgrade to it?

Brian Sulkis
San Francisco, CA

A *Intel's new MMX processor (also known as the P55C) is a Pentium chip that has been designed to perform certain graphics and sound-handling tasks employing 57 new built-in instructions. The idea is that these functions will speed multimedia processing and free up the processor to handle other tasks. The chip is available in 166MHz and 200MHz versions, but so far it's going only to computer makers. At press time, Intel expects to market an OverDrive MMX chip on March 3 for those who want to upgrade earlier Pentiums.*

If you can get your hands on one of the standard chips, you can try it in your existing Pentium, but you're on your own.

Before turning in too many IOUs to get your hands on an MMX chip, however, consider that, as a rule of thumb, if you want to get the most bang for the buck, it's best to avoid buying the latest and greatest. The best values are almost always going to be found one step back from the cutting edge of technology. Keep in mind, too, that the MMX processor hasn't been thoroughly tested yet. Initial indications are that it may not speed up certain types of graphic operations at all. What's more, MMX isn't going to do much for you in any case until software developers write more games that take advantage of the chip's new instructions.

Sound Barriers

Q I am having a little sound-card problem. I recently upgraded my sound card from a regular Sound Blaster to a Sound Blaster 16 PnP. I also have Windows 95. With the new card, when I install some of my DOS games such as Quake, the game's DOS install program can't find my sound card. Yet when I run Quake in Windows 95, all the sound works. Most of my other DOS games' install programs can make the digital sound work, but not the music. But here's where I really need help: I just bought the TIE Fighter Collector's CD and I can play the game from Windows 95 or DOS, but only the digital sound works. I can't hear any of the cool music!

gksed@aol.com

A *The drivers for playing music and digital sounds under DOS have to be loaded separately from those for Windows. When you install Windows 95 it automatically detects the presence of your sound card and installs the appropriate drivers. Not so with DOS. The answer is to pull out your Sound Blaster box and find the software that came with the card so that you can install the DOS drivers. Better yet, log onto Creative Labs' Web page and download the latest set of drivers. The address is* **www.cle.creaf.com**, *or, if you want to go straight to the driver files,* **www.cle.creaf.com/wwwnew/tech/ftp/ftpinx.html**. *If you're still having the problem once you've got all the appropriate drivers installed, check to see that the sound card's DOS volume control isn't turned all the way down. Then, make sure the IRQ is set to 2, 5 or 7.*

Q I've got my computer connected to a stereo system. The sound is great, but I haven't been able to get the receiver to separate the left and right channels. That means I don't get any sense of direction when games I'm playing fade sound from one side to the other. My Sound Blaster 16 sound card has only a single output jack and I'm running a Y cable from it to the receiver. Is the problem in my sound card or the Y connector?

Don Lippincott
Dallas, TX

A *The Sound Blaster 16 provides a single output, as you note. But it is a stereo connector nonetheless. That means you've either got a single-channel Y cable or you're not making the connection properly to the sound card. Try pulling out the jack that plugs into your sound card and looking to see how many sections it is divided into by insulating spacers. If one spacer divides the jack in two, it's a one-channel jack; if there are two spacers and three sections, it's a two-channel (stereo) jack. What you need is a cable with a stereo jack to plug into your Sound Blaster's output. You'll want it to branch to a pair of cables, each with a normal one-channel jack to plug into your receiver's separate input channels.*

Q I recently installed DirectX drivers on my system, and they caused some of my DOS games to lose sound. When I restored my original Win 95 drivers, my DOS games worked properly again. Why? Can't I have DirectX installed for my Win 95 games, but still access my DOS drivers for DOS games?

Jason
Via Fax

A *You're talking about DOS games running in a window under Windows 95, right? Microsoft acknowledges that some DirectX video drivers may conflict with DOS drivers that are trying to access the same resources. The easiest solution—in fact, the only solution I've found so far—is to leave Windows entirely when you want to play DOS games.*

Fax, mail, or e-mail your queries to the S.O.S. staff at:
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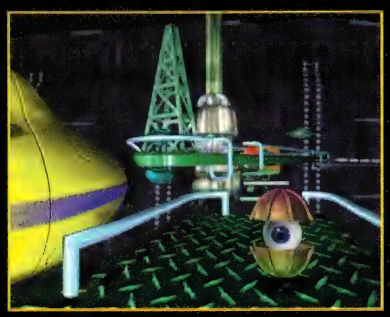

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PC GAMES

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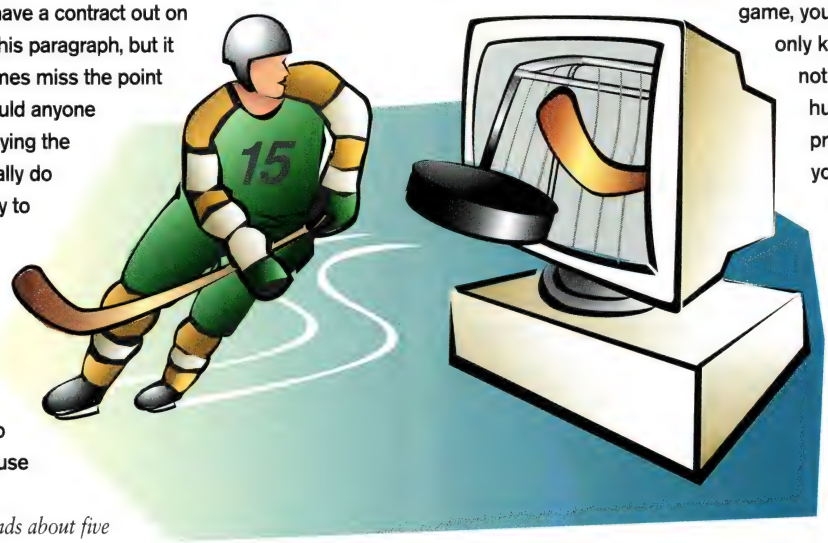
FACE-OFF

Sports: Out Of Bounds?

Don St. John *Daniel Morris*

No question about it—sports fans rule! Why else would they have legions of new sports games to transfer their affections to? What may not be as obvious is that there are gamers who find the whole genre a little—okay, a lot—misdirected. For instance, features editor Don St. John doesn't think it's roundball, or any other kind of ball, unless there's a real ball (or puck). On the other hand, assistant editor and office hockey thug Daniel Morris cheerfully wastes hours at a time on anything resembling a sports game. Who's out of bounds? You make the call (most of the staff, however, think Don's outta his gourd); Don's in the **bold** type and Dan's in the classy *italics*...

OK, I'm sure EA Sports will have a contract out on me before I'm done writing this paragraph, but it needs to be said: Sports games miss the point badly. Totally, in fact. Why would anyone want to sit at a computer playing the one genre that you can actually do in real life? (OK, you could try to live out your Quake or NASCAR 2 fantasies like our humble Editor, Steve Klett, threatens to do, but not without landing in jail.) Anyone doing that needs to get off their duff, go breathe some fresh air, and use their atrophied muscles.



Speaking as someone who spends about five hours a week playing organized, competitive sports, I'd have to say that you completely miss the point of PC sports titles. To quote Denis Leary (a fellow hockey player), the boat left and you weren't on the boat. Allow me: While we can spend as much time as we like shooting hoops or chipping golf balls or throwing the split-finger, I guarantee we'll never do it as well as the pros. Sports games give us the opportunity to live out our hack-hopeful fantasies by granting us, however momentarily, the ability to join Mario Lemieux on a 2-on-1 break, or throw down an alley-oop pass from Penny Hardaway, or drain a 20-foot eagle putt alongside Paul Azinger.

The key word there is "fantasies." Granted, games are all about fantasies. But these fantasies are a little more pernicious than most. Why? Because no matter how many superstar visages companies manage to license, you're not playing anything with those guys. You're not boxing out Dennis Rodman; you're at a keyboard pretending to be in the paint, accompanied by some programmer's version of Rodman's AI (perish the thought). But, as you well know, you can score off a 2-on-1, jam an alley-oop—well, maybe if you lower the rim—or drain a 20-footer. And seeing those dimples drop into the cup after you've read a real-life, real-grass, real-hazards break on the putting green is infinitely more satisfying than pretending that you're in some 72+ playoff against Azinger.

You're a TV sports fan. Don't you ever find yourself shouting, "He should have shot! What is he passing for?" or "No, no, not the neutral-zone trap—let's open this thing up!" PC sports titles put the awesome machinery of a professional sports franchise entirely in my hands, giving me the opportunity to be General Manager and Coach as well as player—hats I could never hope to wear in real life. These games give us armchair GMs a chance to stop grumbling at the morning Sports Final and do something about it!

Hey, I have no problem with GM or Coach mode. They're a fantasy, too, and you're still not handling real pro players, but a set of problems akin to those you'd find in a strategy game, maybe. It's the performance games that miss the mark. Let's review: When you're playing a "sports" game, you're not striking any ball, only keys on a keyboard; you're not in the presence of any human resembling a godlike pro, and never will be; and your arteries are clogging big-time every second you're sitting there essentially doing nothing. I admire your five hours a week playing in real life, and I heartily urge you to sell your copy of FIFA '97 and double them.

Not a chance, because on a dollar-for-dollar value level, my sports titles have brought me the most return-to-cost of all my games by far. A good sports game is almost literally endlessly replayable—I've played through two 82-game seasons in NHL '97 in a few months. You're looking at hundreds and hundreds of hours of gameplay, each as fresh and unique as any real-life game, all for the same sixty bucks I'd have spent on a solve-and-forget game.

Well, it's your free time. Me, I'm going to forego my urge to blast a rocket launcher at the cars going by on the freeway and play some Death Rally instead...after I shoot some H-O-R-S-E.

That's right, walk away. I get the last word! I must be the greatest! Greatest champion of all time! *(See, sports games provide endless practice for trash-talking skills, Don. You're outta your league.)*

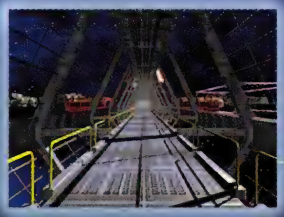
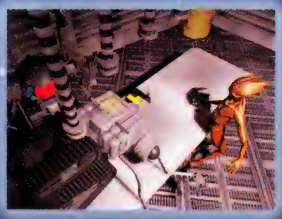
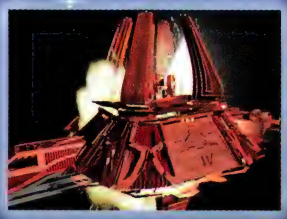
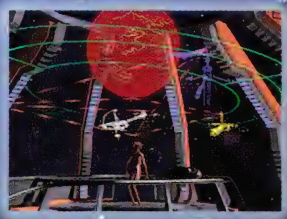
Don St. John has been a sports fan since he watched the Ice Bowl as a 6-year-old in 1967, but thinks that a PC curling title is the inevitable, logical extension of the computerized sports-gaming craze. He's willing to make an exception for a Harlem Globetrotters game, though.

Daniel Morris leads his league in penalty minutes, but insists he's just "playing with heart." He's one of the only guys in the world to receive face punches both as player and as referee. His girlfriend is just as violent, and together they are the scourges of San Francisco's Bladium Co-Ed Inline Hockey League.

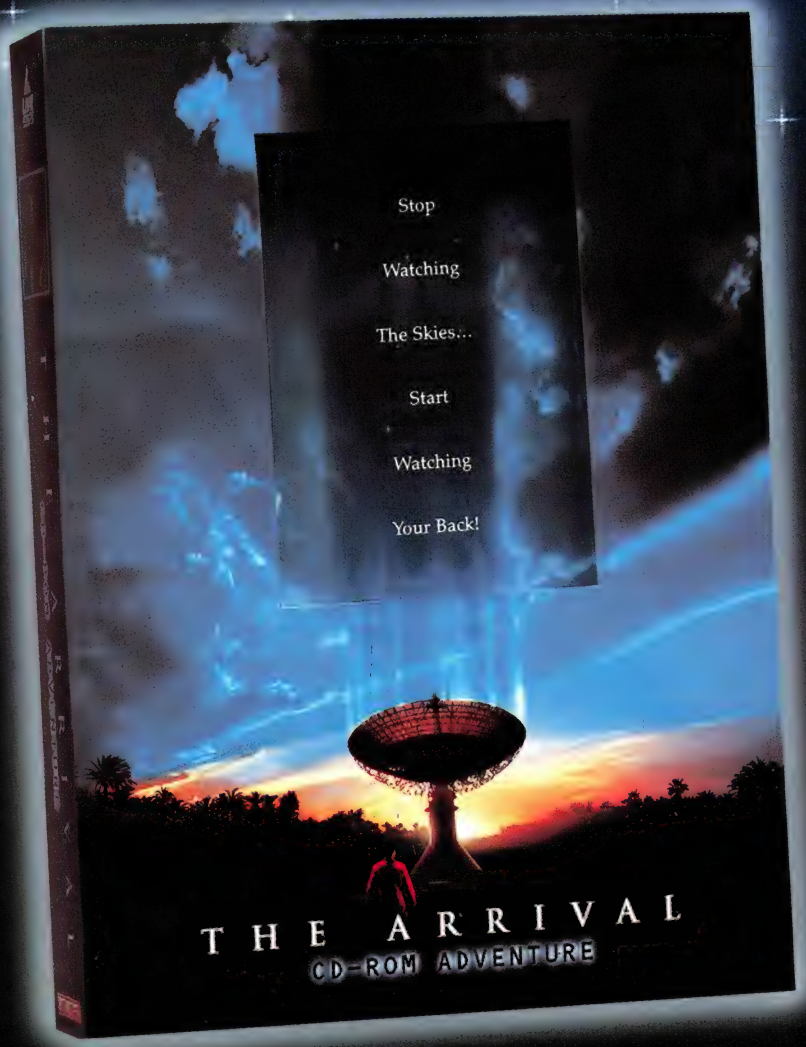
ILLUSTRATION BY LUCIE LUTZKA ZIVNY

THE ARRIVAL

CD-ROM ADVENTURE

ACTUAL GAME PLAY



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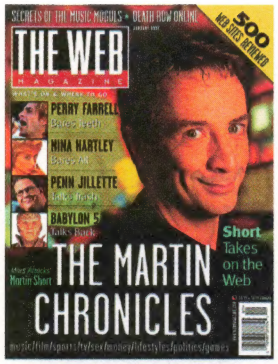

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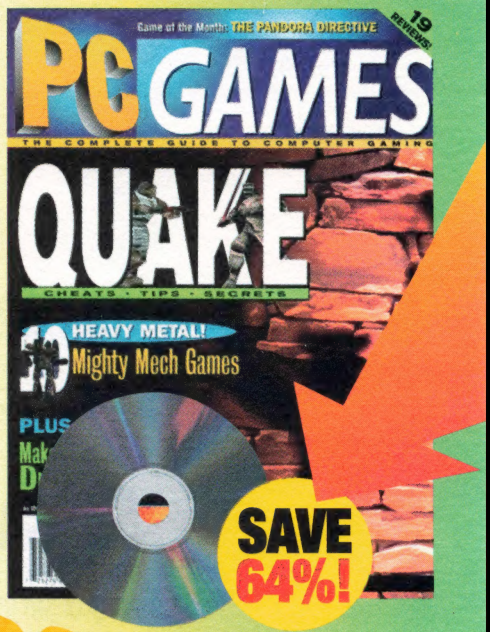

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